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FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 & 36 NORTH MOORE ST., N. Y.
NEW YORK, November 12, 1892.

{ PRICE }
{ 5 CENTS. }

Vol. II.

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THE ARKANSAS SCOUT.

By PAUL BRADDON.



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THE ARKANSAS SCOUT.

By PAUL BRADDON,

Author of "Pawnee Bill's Boys," "Old Oak Burrell, the Journalist Detective," "The Mark of Mystery," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I. THE SCOUT.

"WHAT is that?"
"I didn't hear anything."
"Didn't yer? Listen!"
"Listen it is."

As motionless as statues the two young men stood, waiting for a repetition of the sound which had reached the ears of the Arkansas Scout.

"There it is again!"

"I have it now," said Gabe Wickett.

"What do yer make it out ter be?"

"The cry of a human being in distress," said the scout. "There it comes again!" as a low, hollow, mournful wail came drifting to their ears through the arches of the woods.

"Come, Gabe, we must find out what the trouble is."

Gabe Wickett nodded, and dropping behind his companion, away they glided in Indian file.

In ten minutes they were close to the spot whence the wail emanated. Clear and distinct it now reached their ears, and the agony with which it was freighted made their stout hearts sicken for the poor woman—for it was a woman's cry.

Why was she uttering those cries?

It became necessary to know before venturing further. They had a suspicion as to the truth, and as they slowly advanced, kept their eyes peeled for Indian signs.

Suddenly the scout paused, and with a grunt pointed to the ground.

"Indians!" was the sententious rejoinder of Gabe Wickett, as he saw the print of a moccasin.

Again that wild, agonizing shriek.

Raising one hand by way of cautioning his companion, the scout began to creep forward. They were not far from the spot—in less than five minutes they had entered a screen formed by a clump of trees, from which they could see what was transpiring.

As they entered this cover came another cry, more intense, but weaker.

It was still weaker when they heard it again.

They parted the bushes carefully, and saw a sight which froze the blood in their veins.

Tied to a stake was a woman, and around her the flames were leaping. She was being burned to death at the stake, surrounding which, mocking, laughing and jeering at her anguish, were a band of Indians in their war paint.

The two white men instinctively grasped their rifles in a tighter grip, and for one moment felt like flinging themselves forward and attempting to rescue the woman.

But they had arrived too late!

Already the flames had nearly done their work. She was on fire—her clothing was all ablaze. Each moment her cries became weaker. The skin on her face blistered, charred, peeled off and rolled up like parchment.

It was a terrible sight.

Ay, they were too late!

There came one last moan and cry commingled, denoting supreme anguish, and then her voice became hushed. In drawing breath she had sucked into her throat and lungs a high, leaping tongue of flame. Her head fell forward on her breast, a convulsion thrilled her frame; there came a wild shout of fiendish glee from the red devils—the victim was dead.

A minute or two later the bonds which had

fastened her erect burned through and she fell forward among the glowing embers, where she was allowed to remain.

"The red fiends!" hissed the scout between his clenched teeth. "See, there is the chief, Gabe, do you know him?"

"No."

"It is Hard-Heart."

"Hard-Heart! Then God help the unfortunate pale-face who falls into his hands," was Gabe's rejoinder.

"Gabe, use your eyes now. Does yer see aught of any other white captives?"

Gabe Wickett used his eyes as directed and carefully scanned the little glade in which the Indians had encamped.

"No, I don't," he finally said.

"Nor do I," added the scout. "We'd better draw out'n this place a little, I guess; we're a trifle too clus for safety; one of ther young braves might tumble on us at any minute. Easy, now, Gabe, remember yer steppin' on eggs."

They had great need to be careful, being within a few hundred feet of an Indian camp, and that, too, while it was yet daylight. The sun was still an hour high.

Skulking from the clump of bushes the scout reached a tree; pausing here for a full minute to watch and listen, he then gained the cover of another a dozen feet or so further away, in all of his movements being imitated by his companion.

It was ticklish work, and the two men weighed well every step they took. But they at last began to feel themselves comparatively safe, and were on the point of audibly congratulating each other, when—

"Wagh!"

It was the guttural exclamation of an Indian who had discovered them. For a moment he was too surprised at the unexpected sight of these white men to do more than stare at them. Then he snatched his tomahawk from his belt and sent it flying with force and precision at the scout's head.

Standing as immovable as though carved out of stone the scout watched the flight of the gleaming weapon. Its course being accurately gauged, he swiftly moved to one side, and the hatchet buried itself in a tree on an exact line with the position of his head a minute before.

First uttering a cry of disappointment at the scout's escape, the Indian then set up a wild whoop of warning, and bounded swiftly backward in search of cover.

But, rapid as were his movements, they could not compare with those of the scout. His rifle flew to his shoulder, and hardly seeming to take aim, he drew the trigger.

Crack!

There followed a wild yell, the Indian leaped high into the air and fell with a heavy thud.

As careless as the scout's aim had seemed, it had been so true as to send the bullet into the redskin's brain.

"Now, Gabe," he said, in a low, decided tone. "Now, Gabe, we're in for it, and there's no help for it, either. Dust now, and lively, too. Meet me between midnight and sunrise at the Hole-in-the-rock. Go; and leave me to cover our tracks."

"But, Arkansasaw—"

"No 'buts' about it. Go, I say!"

"But you'll be takin' all the risk, and I—"

"Go!"

The scout spoke imperatively; he would not be gainsaid.

"Well, pard, good-bye," said Gabe, bestowing on the scout a look of gratitude and devotion, and he swiftly disappeared.

For fully two minutes the scout stood there, listening to the confusion in the camp caused by the Indian's cry of warning and the crack of his rifle.

"They're coming," he muttered, as he heard them rushing toward the spot whence the cry and rifle report had come. "They're coming!" and his eyes brightened, and his nostril dilated like those of a horse when the excitement of the race is upon him. "They're coming—now for a chase."

Away he dashed, purposely leaving a broad and easily-followed trail behind him, so as to draw them from that of Gabe. The latter they failed to see at all. The scout's trail was so plain that they pounced on it at once, and like blood-hounds sprang in pursuit of him—at first yelling with rage, and afterwards in utter silence.

Of exceeding length of limb, all bone and muscle, the scout could easily give them odds and then distance them. He knew it, and enjoyed the chase as the cat enjoys playing with the mouse it has caught. He liked to tantalize them—to drive them mad with disappointment.

Once he paused in full sight of them on the crest of a hill.

They saw him, and dashed onward more swiftly, grim-faced, exultant; they thought they had gained on him, that they were sure of their prey.

Mile after mile the scout unwearily ran, still leaving a broad trail behind him. Then he skirted the base of an acclivity, near which ran a stream of water.

Suddenly halting, he gathered his muscles, and by a tremendous leap, landed on a good-sized rock some distance away. Jumping from rock to rock for nearly an eighth of a mile, he suddenly turned at right angles, bounded across the narrow stream, and swiftly ascended a sharply-rising, flat-faced rock.

At its further side it descended sheer and straight down for fifty or sixty feet. About a dozen feet from the top the limbs of a tree brushed the face of the precipice. Clinging by tooth and toenail, the scout hung on to the face of the rock until he was able to make use of the tree, by means of which he reached the level below. Here he paused for a few seconds; he could hear the baffled cry from the Indians; at once his body shook, his stomach flattened, as he laughed a silent, inward laugh, and then he walked leisurely away.

Led by Hard-Heart himself, the Indians had reached the spot where the hitherto broad trail so suddenly ended. This fact puzzled them exceedingly; the stream was too far away from the spot for him to have reached it by a spring; the only rock—the one he had landed on—seemed also too far distant.

Several of the young men tried to spring the distance, and signally failed. But the scout had naturally made use of the stream to cover his trail! So reasoned Hard-Heart, as any Indian would have done; and the fugitive would emerge from the stream somewhere above them.

So up stream they went, puzzled by not finding any traces of the fugitive, either in the bed of the stream, or outside of it.

They hunted until it was dark, and then brought torches to their assistance, but all in vain.

"It is useless," at last said the chief, in the

Indian tongue. "Call in the young men—they can do nothing. We have been chasing the Trackless!"

Again and again had the scout been chased by the Indians, and had always escaped, his trail always disappearing as suddenly as now, which fact had gained for him among the Indians the suggestive name of Trackless.

"The Trackless!" they muttered, and the old men became grave, the younger ones uneasy. "He is a great warrior."

Slowly they retraced their steps to the dell in which they had camped.

"It is the mark of Trackless," said Hard-Heart, pointing at the dead body of the fallen brave. "He was shot through the eye."

And while they were gathered in council, far away by the Hole-in-the-rock, a stern and silent figure stood, waiting patiently. An hour passed, two of them, and still the figure moved not.

"Tu-whit—tu-who!"

Low but distinctly an owl's cry arose from a little distance.

The figure moved.

"Tu-whit—tu-who!"

And then a figure glided from without the darkness beyond.

CHAPTER II.

FORT PLATT.

"WELL, niece, I'm right glad to see you. Come right in. Amandy—Amandy, here's Floy Raynor come before we expected her."

Mrs. Platt came out of the rude block-house and warmly welcomed the new-comer; and lastly came Josie Platt and her brother George, the former of whom kissed Floy, the latter wishing he dared to do likewise.

Floy Raynor, an only child, within the past year had lost both her parents. After the death of her mother—who had been a sister to John Platt—the latter had offered her a home, did she choose to leave the settlements and come to Fort Platt, situated on the banks of the Arkansas river, not far from the present site of Little Rock.

Here John Platt had come a dozen years before, being the only white man that far west, excepting the hardy hunters and trappers; and even at the time of which we write, none were further west except these trappers and hunters.

At first his was the only family at Fort Platt. The Indians had nearly driven him back into the settlements lower down, and probably he would have given up the rich lands he held had not several hardy and venturesome families settled there to keep him company.

All told they numbered seven males all able to handle a rifle properly, which force, ensconced in the block-house, was formidable enough to make the Indians chary of attacking them, and for the last six or seven years they had experienced no trouble at all with their red neighbors.

Such was the position of affairs at the juncture when pretty Floy Raynor came among them.

The orphan's eyes filled with tears of gratitude at the warm and hearty welcome she received, and turning to the scout in whose charge she had come up the river, she said:

"When you see them tell them all that I am very—very happy here, and that they are very kind to me."

As they were eating supper that night, the door was suddenly darkened by a lank figure.

"Arkansaw!" exclaimed John Platt, as he glanced toward the door. "Come in—come in—Amandy, get another plate—two on 'em, for Gabe's with him—and pull up chairs. Sit down, boys and pitch in—if the grub runs short with what's on the table we've got more stored away somewhere."

The eyes of Arkansaw—for so he was always called among the whites—had been roving around the room until they had at last reached the face of Floy Raynor.

An expression of interest came into his bronzed, weather-beaten visage and Floy blushed.

"My niece," said John Platt. "Sit down, Arkansaw—sit down, Gabe. Why do you keep standin' there? Any news? Anything stirring?"

"Yes, there's a trifle of news," returned Arkansaw, as he took the chair which had been placed for him. "I'll tell it to you after a little," with a meaning look, and a glance at the women.

Platt's face became grave, and no sooner

had the two scouts finished their meal than he asked them if they wouldn't go outside for a smoke.

"Now, what is it?" he asked, when they were fairly out of earshot.

"Indians!"

"We are in danger of being attacked?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"To-night."

"It can't be."

Arkansaw shrugged his shoulders.

"But we are not fixed to stand an attack," said Platt, earnestly.

"That is your fault," said the scout, brusquely. "You should always have kept in readiness."

"Can it not be staved off? Can we not make a sortie?"

"Gabe and me makes our whole force nine men. Nine agin thirty-five of Hard-Heart's braves! We'd stand about as much show as a chipmunk agin a panther."

"Hard Heart!" gasped John Platt, and brave and hardy man though he was, his cheek paled at that dreaded name. "Arkansaw, what's to be done?"

"Get ready to fight 'em," was the cool reply, "and there is no time to be wasted, nuther."

In ten minutes the scene was one of bustle and excitement.

Men, women and children were all busy, transporting provisions and their most valuable household effects into the block-house; others went out into the fields and drove the live stock within the palisades.

It was the scout who had stood so motionless and patient beside the Hole-in-the-rock, and the owl's cry had come from the lips of Gabe Wickett.

After meeting, these two men had gravely discussed the situation and compared notes. When day broke they cautiously made their way toward the Indian camp again. That they were on the warpath was evident, and being in this section of the country, pointed at Fort Platt's having been selected by them to make a raid upon.

This became a settled conviction in the mind of the scout, when during the afternoon the savages took the trail, following a straight course to Fort Platt.

At once he and Gabe had made for this point at the top of their speed, arriving as described.

In less than an hour from the time of Floy Raynor's advent into the family circle of Mr. Platt, she and Josie were warm friends.

Floy's cheeks lost their color when she heard that they were in danger of being attacked that night by the Indians.

"On your very first night with us, too," said Josie, regretfully. "I'm sorry, Floy; it is too bad. But you will not be very much afraid, will you? See, I am not. See how steady my hand is."

Josie's color had fled in spite of her assertion that her nerves were steady. She did not, however, show her fear; she would not have been the daughter of a frontiersman had not she felt a certain pride in being called a brave girl.

"I will try not to be afraid," was the brave reply of Floy. "But I have never had any experience, you know"—with a faint smile.

"You have been under fire before, Josie?"

"Once, when I was quite a little girl, twelve years ago now. It was the time"—her voice was a little thick and strained—"when they took little Joe away from us."

"I've heard of that, Josie. How was it? How did it happen?"

"Joe and I were playing outside, some distance away from the house. When they came—it was in the daytime—I was so frightened that I ran toward the house as fast as I could go. Father kept them at bay until help came, and then they went away, taking my little brother with them."

"And you have never seen him since?" inquired Floy in an interested tone.

"No."

"Nor heard of him?"

"Not even heard of him," was the reply. "And so we don't know to this day whether he is alive or dead."

"How old was he?"

"He was nearly seven then."

"Then he would be almost a man now. But I am keeping you from work, Josie; let me help you, and whatever you can do I will do, even to firing a rifle. So, there!" and tightly

closing her teeth, Floy arose, and soon was busy in helping prepare for the attack.

Encouraged by the scouts, the men worked like beavers, and by a little after ten o'clock they were as nearly ready as it was possible for them to be, and then, gathered in the block-house, a brooding silence fell upon them while they waited.

Late in the afternoon an Indian scout had peered upon the settlement and had reported to his chief that as yet no alarm had reached these people, whom they had marked for the tomahawk and scalping knife.

Near the hour of deepest gloom Hard-Heart's band stole noiselessly toward the fort, until at last they were at the foot of the stockade. They tried the door, and, as they had expected, found it fastened.

"Now, boys," said Arkansaw, at the door of the block-house, and the men filed forth with faces set and stern, knowing full well that some of their number might never return.

In a whisper the scout gave his orders, and silent and motionless as shadows, they waited for the supreme moment.

It was not long delayed. Finding the gate fastened, the Indians began to mount the stockade. At the very moment they were exulting in the idea of a victory, bloodless to themselves, a rifle report rang forth; the crack of doom it was to one of their number, and a signal besides to the hardy pioneers.

Instantly followed a death-dealing volley, and half a dozen of the Indians who had mounted the stockade fell, either dead or dying.

"Lively—lively!" cried the scout. "Load up! They'll make a grand rush now."

He was right. Though disconcerted, Hard-Heart soon recovered his wits, and ordered a rush over the stockade while the rifles of their antagonists were empty.

But the scout was quicker than the chief in having his orders executed, and following the sharp crack of Arkansaw's rifle came another volley, spreading terror and dismay among the redskins, who at once beat a hasty retreat.

"So far, good!" said the scout, in a satisfied tone. "But they'll be back presently. Hard-Heart will not give up yet."

An hour of profoundest silence succeeded, but it did not deceive Arkansaw, for he was an experienced Indian fighter, and up to all the wiles and tricks of the red devils.

Fierce and furious was the onslaught when it did come. But encouraged by Arkansaw, the men stuck bravely to their posts, and once again their savage foes were driven back.

Another long silence followed, broken at last by a cry of alarm from one of the white men as he pointed at a flaming arrow bursting through the dense gloom.

"They are trying to fire the block-house!" exclaimed John Platt. "God help us! it is dry as tinder."

CHAPTER III.

"LIGHTNING."

LEAVING two men at the stockade to act as sentinels, Arkansaw hurried the others within the block-house. Of all the weapons made use of by an Indian, fire is the most to be dreaded, and must be promptly battled with. Should the fire once catch, a delay of a single minute might prove fatal.

"Water!" cried Arkansaw. "Water! Fill up everything you've got that will hold a drop."

Springing up the ladder that led to the scuttle, he raised the latter a little and glanced over the roof. From some distance away flaming arrows were constantly rising, describing long curves in the air, some of them dropping wide of the mark, others striking and sticking upright in the roof of the block-house.

The sight of the burning arrows, flying like meteors, was a beautiful one; but oppressed by the knowledge of the danger they brought in their flight, not one among the whites could appreciate the scene. With them every flame-tipped dart bore with it a terrible problem—that of life and death.

"Water!" exclaimed Arkansaw. "Pass it up lively!"

They heard, and faces grew pale, and stout hearts quaked. The block-house was on fire.

But it was where the scout could pour water on it without exposing himself to any great extent. In a minute or two it was quenched.

Then again came the order for water. But the incipient conflagration was subdued quickly. Again and again the roof took fire, and as frequently was the fire put out. Each time that the fire took, a wild yell of triumph would come from the Indians, and each time it was put out there followed a savage shriek of disappointment.

They could be likened to nothing else besides a pack of hungry wolves thirsting for human blood.

Once again the fire caught and once again an eager yell of triumph burst from the throats of the red fiends. The fire had caught in a spot which could not be reached with water from the scuttle.

The scout hesitated.

The flames began to leap up higher; he could hear them crackle and snap. He glanced at it. Whatever was to be done, must be done promptly. Strange though it was, at that instant arose before the scout's mental vision the fair, sweet face of Floy Raynor.

He no longer hesitated.

It was sure death to all if the fire was not extinguished; and he might come safely back.

"Water!" he cried, and stepped up through the scuttle and on the roof.

Crack!

A bullet whizzed by close to his head. A fiendish yell rang in his ears. He caught up a pail of water, and with slow and steady steps advanced along the roof toward the spot where it was igniting.

Crack!

Crack!

With his tall form outlined against the sky, played upon by the flames, he would have fallen an easy victim had there been any passable marksmen among the redskins. But all did not possess fire-arms, and those who did were not very expert in their use.

Still the bullets flew too close for comfort, one having passed through the fox-skin cap of the scout, and cutting off the long, bushy tail in which he had taken so much pride.

Splash—hiss—splutter!

Back for another bucket.

Back and forth he went, made a target of at every trip, but seeming to bear a charmed life.

It was a grand sight, that of this brave and hardy man walking back and forth so coolly, his own life hanging by a hair, trying to save the other inmates of the fort.

There came a wild, maddening, furious cry. It was one of disappointment, drawn from the redskins as they saw the flames flicker, flutter, then die, and then witnessed the calm return of Arkansaw to the scuttle, down which he disappeared in a very leisurely manner.

"If we can hold out until daybreak the varmints will give us a breathing spell until night comes again," said the scout, as coolly as though he had not just passed through a most trying ordeal.

Hardly had the words fallen from his mouth when Josie Platt, on guard at the door below, uttered a few sharp words.

"Platt, you watch the roof," dropped like a flash from Arkansaw's lips. "The rest of you follow me."

Down the stairs and out of the block-house door they flew, and thence to the stockade.

"What is it?" demanded the scout of one of the pickets left there.

"They're trying to scale the stockade again!" was the reply. "At least I saw one of the devils put his head over. I had just got a bead on him when he dropped on the other side, and ran to the right there."

Stepping as lightly as a cat the scout hurried away to the gate, keeping in close to the stockade, and followed by several others. His eyes swept the top of the stockade until at last they encountered a projection which he knew was not the top of one of the stakes. Instantly he halted, and holding up his hand, the others halted also.

It was an Indian's head that he saw.

It was turned swiftly this way and that; but its owner failed to see the dark forms so closely hugging the stockade. Only an instant the Indian paused, and then he wriggled over the stockade and lightly dropped to the ground.

As he did so Arkansaw bounded forward and deftly got him by the throat.

"Do you surrender?" he sternly demanded.

He could see the glowing eyes flash swiftly about. The Indian saw that he was sur-

rounded, and folding his arms, drew himself proudly up.

"Wagh!" he grunted. "It is good! Lightning is a fool—the pale-faces are great braves!"

"He surrenders," said the scout. "Disarm him. There take him to the block-house and bind him. But stay—Lightning, are you alone in this attempt to scale the stockade?"

"Can any one get blood from a stone?" was the figurative reply.

"Take him away."

The scout saw that it would be useless to question their captive.

But no further attempt of the kind was made, and the scout's breath began to come more freely as the darkness grew less dense. Day was not far distant. The burning arrows were sent forth less and less frequently, and finally ceased altogether.

And then the darkness disappeared, day broke, the sun arose. Not an Indian was to be seen. But for the blood which bespattered the stockade, and their prisoner, one could have imagined the events of the past terrible night had never transpired.

"Let us have a look at our prisoner," said the scout, about an hour after sunrise, when all danger of attack was passed.

They brought forth the young Indian, his hands bound in front of him.

"Why, he is scarcely more than a boy!" exclaimed the scout.

The Indian's figure became proudly erect, his lip curled with scorn and his eyes flashed.

"I have then the more years in which to avenge the red man's wrongs!" he grunted, in the Indian tongue, every word of which was understood by Arkansaw.

"Why did you venture all alone to try and get inside the palisades?"

"Lightning only boy, but old as hills here," smiting his breast. "Injin village leave Sunlight—Sunlight wait see Lightning bring scalps—then Sunlight go to wigwam of Lightning. Some day pale-face hide head when hear name of Lightning—big brave den—chief maybe," and he glanced proudly about him.

"If I let you go do you think you can get Hard-Heart to draw off his braves?"

"Wouldn't do if could—radder be killed first," was the reply. "Night come again, sometime, nodder time—Hard-Heart scalp—kill—burn."

"But he can't conquer us. See how many we are, and Hard-Heart has but few braves. Do you know how many?"

The Indian nodded.

"How many are killed?"

"Lightning got no crooked tongue—no tell lie—won't tell trut."

The Indian's eyes had been wandering about noting everything that was to be seen. They now came in contact with the face of Mrs. Platt; quick as a flash the rigid lines in his face relaxed, and a puzzled expression crept into it.

"Who you?" he demanded.

The abruptness of the question drew attention more keenly to the Indian; Mrs. Platt started; a wild idea had crossed her mind. She gazed keenly at him, and her sharp eyes detected what the others had overlooked—a hole in the hunting shirt through which gleamed a patch of white skin.

She sprang forward, tore aside the hunting shirt of the dressed skin.

"See!" she cried. "This is no Indian, but a white man."

She shrank away from him, that she might better gaze into his face. Her features were working, her frame was trembling with emotion.

"Joel!"

The word fell from her lips in a pleading, anguished tone.

The young Indian started as if he had heard a familiar sound.

"Joel! I am your mother. You are a pale-face, and not an Indian."

She would have sprang upon him and enclosed him in her arms. But he stepped haughtily back.

"Lightning no pale-face—Lightning Injin."

"But see—your skin is white."

"Manitou angry with Lightning's mudder—make Lightning with white skin. Blood Injin—heart Injin—all Injin 'cept skin—an' skin easily cover with war-paint."

"My boy—my boy! do you turn away from me? Do you not remember my face—my voice? There—look closely," and the an-

guished woman brushed the hair back from her forehead with both hands.

With bated breath the others watched and listened. Was this the little Joe stolen from them twelve years before? There could be no doubt of it.

Long and fixedly Lightning gazed on the woman who had given him birth; had nursed him, on whose breast he had laid, whom he had called "mama." His face indicated that a struggle was going on within his breast, that memory was struggling to recall the past.

But his savage tutors had done their work well. Every natural impulse had been changed, and he was at heart as thorough an Indian as though his skin had been red as blood.

Mrs. Platt—poor woman!—stood there with outstretched arms, dumbly pleading for one look of recognition—one single call of "mother."

But it did not come.

Instead, the face hardened, and he turned coldly from her.

"You not Lightning mudder—she gone to happy hunting-ground. Pale-face squaw heap fool—Lightning all Injin—scalp—burn—kill—take scalps back, den Sunlight come to wigwam."

"God help me!" moaned the poor woman. "Oh, Joe—Joe, surely you have not so completely forgotten me! Look once again—"

"Pale-face squaw heap fool!" he angrily said. "No Joe—me Lightning—young Injin brave. Don't believe it? Then see!"

Before any one could comprehend what he was about, they saw him slip his hands from his bonds, and the next instant he was bounding toward the palisades.

One grand spring placed his hands on top of them, and he then drew himself swiftly up, gaining the top, and uttering a shrill yell of defiance.

John Platt's rifle sprang to his shoulder. He took a swift aim—his finger pressed the trigger.

"John—John, do not shoot! Remember, he is our son!"

John Platt's face was set and stern, but terribly anguished in expression.

"He is an Indian in heart and feeling—would betray us—would scalp us all," he hoarsely said, and then—

Crack!

A wild shriek came from Mrs. Platt, then a blood-curdling yell from beyond the stockade.

"The Indians are upon us!" gasped the scout. And so they were.

CHAPTER IV.

REPULSED AGAIN.

"THE Indians are upon us again!"

So the scout had exclaimed. It was a complete surprise to him, as Indians very rarely, under those circumstances, would attempt an attack except under cover of night.

But, as we have said before, Hard-Heart was no common Indian, but was far more intelligent and active than most redskins. Though he had called off his braves and had retired, it was to no great distance.

At once he had posted several Indians in trees, from which the interior of the stockade could be seen. When Lightning was brought forth and stood surrounded by the whites the information was conveyed to the chief.

He bade the scouts look sharp.

Presently he learned how great an object of interest the young captive had become, that the very guards had deserted their posts to gather near the mother and son and watch the agonizing scene in progress.

Instantly he grasped the situation.

There was now an excellent opportunity of surprising the whites.

He uttered a few words.

With an astonishing celerity the braves prepared for an attack, and in a few minutes were softly stealing across the open space before the stockade.

When half the distance had been crossed they suddenly saw the figure of Lightning appear on top of the stockade, and a murmur of admiration ran from lip to lip.

It was a feat worthy of a great brave to escape from the midst of his enemies in such a manner.

They heard his cry of defiance, and on the impulse of the moment joined in with it.

Crack!

It was the rifle of John Platt.

Lightning half sprang, half fell from the stockade on the outside.

The bullet had flown wide of its aim, for Mrs. Platt had rushed forward and knocked up the muzzle of the death dealing weapon.

"Whatever else he may be, he is our son still!" she solemnly said.

"To arms!" cried Arkansaw. "Ha! some of you have left your guns in the block-house. Get them—lively! Every man who is armed stand by! Steady! All loaded up? Then follow me!"

The gate in the stockade being the most vulnerable point, stages had been erected on each side of it; on these the men sprang, one-half on each, and prepared to thrust the muzzles of their rifles into the downward slanting loopholes, so placed as to command the space before the gate.

At this the Indians were rushing pell-mell, and in a body suddenly flung themselves against it, causing it to creak and groan and tremble.

"Now!" cried a low, firm, stern voice. "Fire!"

Crack—crack!

Crack—crack!

Each man of them had selected his own victim; they very rarely wasted powder and lead; four of the red demons were sent to the happy hunting grounds.

"Load!" cried the stimulating voice of Arkansaw. "Ram home the charges! In with the lead! Ready! Fire!"

Crack—crack!

Crack—crack!

Crack! Again the redskins had flung themselves against the gate.

Crack—crack!

Crack—crack!

Those who had rushed into the block-house for their weapons were back now; were on the platform; those who had fired already had fallen back from the loopholes to give them a chance.

Nine or ten of the Indians had fallen. Such punishment they could not stand; a panic was breaking out among the survivors. Like a good general, Hard-Heart saw this and ordered a retreat, and away they scurried, leaving their dead behind them.

The long, lank form of the scout arose above the stockade, he took a swift but careful aim, and fired. The headlong swiftness of one of the Indians was for one moment accelerated, and then he fell heavily and remained motionless.

The others never paused to pick him up, but only fled the faster, swiftly carrying themselves beyond rifle range, and then disappearing into the woods.

The scout leaned over the stockade and counted the fallen Indians, which done, he laughed that peculiar, noiseless laugh of his, and turning to John Platt, said:

"Well, what between last night and just now, we've reduced their band more than one-half, I should judge. This experience ought to sicken 'em. But s'posen we have a little grub and some hot coffee; I kinder feel gone here," laying his hand on his stomach.

Pausing first to give some orders about keeping up the guard, he and John Platt went toward the block-house. At its door they were met by Mrs. Platt, who asked, in a strained voice:

"Was he there?"

"Yes."

"And—and—was he—did he—fall?"

"No," and Arkansaw's voice was filled with sympathy. "Not a man among us but what would spare him for your sake."

The table was spread when the men entered, and Josie Platt and pretty Floy Raynor were there ready to wait on them. Two men were left on guard; the others were soon gathered, and then the brave defenders refreshed themselves. Before the first mouthful was taken, however, the scout, in a simple, earnest tone, said:

"We are all here."

They knew what he meant, and probably there was not a man among them whose heart did not return thanks for his preservation.

The scout's words touched Floy, and she thought:

"He is a good man—as good as he is brave."

"Religious!" and John Platt laughed heartily. "Religious!" and he turned from his niece and called to the scout: "I say, Arkansaw!"

"Hush, uncle, please," pleaded Floy.

But her uncle did not heed.

"I say, Arkansaw, come here; Floy wants to know if you ain't very religious?"

The scout smiled. He could smile if he chose to, and it changed his expression wonderfully.

"No, Miss Floy, I ain't 'zactly religious, and have never been inside of a church but mighty few times. But I ain't a scoffer at religion. Do you see the sun shining there? So do I, and at night I can see the stars. And I can see the leaves come out on the trees, and I can see the grass grow. And that makes me know that there is a God, though I never could drop into the regulation way of thinking of Him."

Again he smiled on her, and then turned and walked away.

It hardly seemed like day in the fort; the usual bustle was absent, and a quietness and hush hung over the place, for the men were sleeping and recruiting their strength, for it was to be supposed that the Indians would return to the attack again during the coming night.

Shortly after dark, Arkansaw and Gabe stole away from the fort on a scouting expedition. When they returned, an hour later, their faces were lighted with an expression of satisfaction.

"Unless I'm wonderfully out of my reckoning, the Injuns have pulled up stakes and lit out."

"Gone?" said John Platt.

"Yes, gone; they got so badly treated that they have made up their minds that if they was not strong enough at first, they certainly ain't strong enough now to hope to carry the fort. I miss my guess, or we won't see 'em to-night."

Nor did they. The night passed quietly without alarm, and when morning broke, the dead bodies still lay in front of the gate of the stockade. Hard-Heart's desertion of his dead was ample proof that he was thoroughly demoralized.

"But don't you crow too much," cautioned the scout. "You may not see anything of Hard-Heart for a week, or a month, or a year, but don't you believe that he will ever forget or forgive last night's work. He will come back to avenge his ill-success when he has the force to do it, and when he comes it will be suddenly, and with the force of a whirlwind; mark my words," said Arkansaw, solemnly, "and never relax a vigilant guard, and keep prepared."

Under the scout's leadership, a large grave was dug, into which the dead Indians were tumbled, and then covered up with earth.

"There is no present danger," said the scout, in reply to a question of Platt's. "Me and Gabe will leave you in a few minutes, for—" and his brow wrinkled. "Hard-Heart's band is still strong enough to do a big lot of deviltry. He may go further down the river, and strike the single families scattered about."

After a few minutes spent in an examination of his weapons, Arkansaw stalked into the block-house, which he entered as the sun was rising.

"Good-bye, all!" he said, gruffly.

"Good-bye!" said Floy, glancing up at him with a sweet look on her face.

"Good-bye!" said Josie, and then Mrs. Platt uttered the same words, adding:

"Arkansaw—my poor, benighted boy!—spare him!—save him if you can!"

"I will," was the reply, and Gabe and he left the fort.

CHAPTER V.

THE TOMAHAWK AT WORK.

ARKANSAW had made a study of Indian nature, and guessed close to the truth when he said that Hard-Heart, in all probability, would try to wipe out the disgrace and avenge his loss at the fort by attacking and wiping out such solitary and defenseless families as he could safely swoop down upon.

A good politician is one who foresees the bent of mind of the general public and makes it his own, thus appearing to lead, when in reality he is led. So it was with Hard-Heart after he and the survivors had reached their camping ground in the woods. Usually the Indians would have submitted to any decision of his, however intricate. But just now they were rendered ungovernable by their losses, and were smarting for a revenge which they did not dare to try and exact from the defenders of the fort.

This he saw, and governed himself accordingly.

He gained their attention and began a short speech by saying that the fort was more strongly defended than he had supposed.

"The pale-faces outnumber us two to one," he said. "Against any less odds who could have withstood the brave warriors before me?" and the braves were tickled by the flattery. "We sent out the Panther to scout, but his tongue was crooked, and he told us what was not so" (Panther was dead, or Hard-Heart would hardly have dared to accuse him of lying). "But all pale-faces are the same—we hate them all equally, and for every brave that has fallen here we will kill two pale-faces. They fill the land—they are not far from here—only an easy march. What say my brothers? Shall we go upon the death-trail and wipe out this disgrace and take home many scalps, or shall we return empty-handed? Hard-Heart has spoken. You all know what his answer would be: 'Let not a pale-face live, let the tomahawk drink the blood of all of them!'"

This political speech was hailed with applause, and in a few minutes they were on the move.

As the sun was just sinking to rest they reached the edge of a small clearing, in the center of which stood a typical frontiersman's log hut. The husband and father was standing in the doorway, with amused face, watching the gambols of his two sturdy children as they played hard by.

The mother was bustling about in the interior, preparing supper, occasionally pausing to bend for a second above a rude cradle in which her youngest born was lying.

Smoke was curling up from the chimney and mounting heavenward in graceful rings.

The smiling-faced father, the happy children, the ascending smoke, made up a singularly attractive picture of sweet content and peace.

Yet it was without charm to those dark-faced fiends whose glowing eyes were gazing about and upon the scene. The attraction to them was in counting the scalps to be taken.

"Wagh!" grunted Hard-Heart.

The others held themselves in readiness, with muscles gathered like panthers prepared for a spring.

Hard-Heart was the best shot with a rifle of any of their number, and he was now taking aim at the pioneer, who stood all unconscious that his soul was trembling on the brink of eternity. The pioneer formed a splendid human target, and could have found no better one under any circumstances.

Crack!

A rifle's report suddenly broke in upon the almost holy quiet of that peaceful spot. The pioneer dropped dead on his doorstep, without so much as uttering a moan or a sigh. An instant later followed an appalling yell from the throats of the Indians, now bounding across the clearing with the ferocity of tigers, making straight for the children, who had stopped playing, and who now watched the approach of the Indians, frozen with terror.

It is customary to ascribe a high degree of courage to Indians. There may be an exception, but as a rule they are contemptible cowards, attacking only when in superior numbers, or so ambushed as to enable them to shoot down their enemies unseen, and then rush in upon the survivors while they are in consternation and confusion. Crafty and vindictive they certainly are, and cruel as hell itself; no other comparison than the foregoing can possibly be made.

"Mama—mama!" came the piteous cries of the children.

They were in the clutches of the red fiends. Tomahawks flashed; those who had been successful in winning the prizes uttered shrill cries of savage glee and tore off the reeking scalps, then turned and bounded toward the hut in the wake of those who, disappointed in not first reaching the children, had turned their attention toward the mother.

The latter had sprang to the door after her husband's fall, and a loud shriek of anguish was wrung from her heart as she witnessed the fate of her offspring.

In another minute she was struggling in the grasp of an Indian. Another dashed by her, caught sight of the babe in the cradle, and slaughtered it before her eyes.

Ten minutes later Hard-Heart and his band were swiftly retreating from the spot, and

the flames were rapidly wrapping the hut in its scorching embrace.

Like a tornado they had swept down on this peaceful spot, leaving naught behind but terrible devastation.

At Hard-Heart's belt hung the scalp of the pioneer, it being his right as he had shot the man. Beside Hard-Heart stalked Lightning.

"Where are Lightning's scalps?" asked Hard-Heart, sarcastically, glancing at the other's belt.

"He has taken none," was the reply, in the Indian tongue. (The reader will understand, without our repeatedly alluding to it, that we give a free translation in English, to save trouble.)

"And does Lightning expect to be smiled upon by Sunlight if he returns empty-handed?"

"Lightning does not wish that the first scalp that hangs at his belt should be that of a child," was the proud reply.

"It is well," grunted Hard-Heart. "Lightning soars a higher game. He should be called the Eagle."

The young Indian—for such he was, though his skin was white—carried his head a little more proudly.

"I will never fight with children," glancing contemptuously toward the Indian at whose belt hung the scalp of the infant.

Despise and condemn his white blood as he might, this feeling was due to that, and that alone.

"You will have a chance soon to fight with others," said Hard-Heart. "Then we shall see whether Lightning is a faint-hearted squaw or a brave."

"We shall see."

Not many miles from the spot where this terrible scene had been enacted stood another hut. Night's mantle was upon it when the red fiends drew near it; its inmates were peacefully slumbering, nor knew that the destroyer was near.

A huge log was lying near the hut. It was raised, and at the word of command from Hard-Heart the Indians ran swiftly toward the hut.

Crash!

The door, strongly made and secured as it was, was carried from its fastenings at the first blow, and the sleepers awoke with the din of the Indian whoop in their ears.

The hut contained two able-bodied men—and Heaven knows they did all they could—two grown women and four children.

Lightning was one of the first to enter the hut. He encountered one of its inmates and grappled with her; a shriek informed him that it was a woman instead of a man.

He uttered a chagrined cry, and raised his tomahawk to strike.

"Mercy! Spare me!" cried the girl, in piteous tones.

The tomahawk wavered—some inward monitor told him it would be unmanly to strike her down—that a man should fight a man.

Clutching her wrist, he led her from the hut, and holding his captive, waited patiently until the bloody work was done and the torch applied, and then, when the retreat began, fell into line with his prisoner.

Day was breaking when they halted in a little glade, beside a small creek whose waters emptied into the Arkansas river.

Sullen-faced, with arms folded across his breast, he stood beside his captive as Hard-Heart approached him about an hour or so later.

"Lightning has a prisoner. Has he reserved her for the stake?"

The young Indian was silent.

"No," added Hard-Heart, sneeringly. "He has saved her because he is a weak-hearted boy. He feels faint at the sight of blood. He is not a brave in his heart. He is fit only to dig and work like a squaw. He has no business on the war-path, and should be with the women. Sunlight will be glad when Lightning comes back—she will love this pale-face, and will take her and Lightning into her lodge."

The young Indian's eyes had flashed, his face had worked as these taunts were showered upon him. At mention of Sunlight's name his hand had leaped to his tomahawk, and he scowled on his captive, who cowered with terror.

"Lightning does not feel faint at sight of blood," hissed the Indian. "See! He will prove it," and he snatched forth and flourished his gleaming tomahawk above his head.

Another second and it would have been buried in the girl's head.

Crack!

The handle was cut in twain, the blade dropped, in his hand he held but a stump. For one instant an intense silence followed, and then the woods re-echoed with a mad-dened yell.

CHAPTER VI.

SURROUNDED BY FIRE.

"WELL, pard, I see you've got something on yer mind; so spit er out. What is it?"

So spoke Gabe Wickett, coming to a halt, and laying a hand on Arkansaw's arm, when they had got out of sight of the fort.

"You can read me pretty well," was the reply, in a grave voice. "Yes, I have got suthin' on my mind, and I'll tell yer now what 'tis. Last night, just after sundown, it struck me that the sky looked red to the south of us here, just as if there was a fire, and I'm durnedly afraid that Hard-Heart's band have paid Sid Gulick a visit. We must make straight for his clearin' now."

Acquainted with every foot of the woods, the scout was able to save considerable distance.

His fears proved to be only too well founded, for all that was left of Sid Gulick's hut was a pile of embers.

Arkansaw at once examined the trail, and when he saw its direction, he at once hoarsely said:

"Come on, Gabe, the red devils are a-pintin' straight for McGrath's claim."

Instead of following the trail of the Indians, Arkansaw took a direct course towards the clearing alluded to.

Half way there he suddenly paused.

"What is it, pard? Indian sign?" inquired Gabe.

Arkansaw pointed at the ground. An instant later he knelt to examine it more closely.

"This trail is hardly an hour old. They have been to M'Grath's clearing, and are now getting back into the country as lively as they can go."

Dropping into a jog-trot, the two scouts rapidly drew upon the Indians. As they were descending a sloping bit of ground, at the foot of which Arkansaw knew there was a creek, they came to a halt.

"We must be more careful now, Gabe," he said. "The creek bottom makes a pretty bit of ground for a camping place, and the varmints may have halted."

It was well for them that the place was thickly covered with bushes, or even then they must have been discovered by the Indians, so close were they to the camp.

This information was conveyed to them by an Indian speaking in a louder tone than usual.

"Ha! we are right upon 'em," muttered Arkansaw, and at once stepped aside from the trail, entering the thickest growth of bushes to be seen, and then, flat on his stomach, he wriggled along like a snake.

At last he could see right into the camp. He was in a direct line with Lightning and his captive, and heard the taunting words of Hard-Heart, whose significance he perfectly understood.

He at once thrust the muzzle of his rifle ahead of him, and drew back the hammer. A fearful struggle was going on in his mind. He could not lie calmly there and see this poor girl murdered and yet—"Spare him—save him if you can!"—rang in his ears, and he remembered the promise he had given to the mother of this wretched being—white by birth, an Indian in breeding and feeling.

There was but an instant's time to reflect and decide what to do, for already the merciless tomahawk had been raised to perform its bloody mission.

"If my aim is as good as it used to be—" he muttered, and leaving the sentence unfinished, quickly aimed and fired.

It was a brilliant shot, and when he saw the handle severed, a flash of pride crossed his bronzed face.

"Git, Gabe!"

Gabe Wickett knew that there was no use in trying to go counter to Arkansaw's orders, and merely cast an inquiring glance toward him, as if asking for further orders.

"Make a short detour to the north, and cover your trail in the creek. I'll lead 'em

away to the south. Meet me at any of the old places."

Gabe was dashing away already when the wild yell of the Indians burst out.

At first they had been thunderstruck, but quickly recovered when Hard-Heart significantly pointed to the cloud of smoke curling up above the clump of bushes in which Arkansaw was concealed.

Half a dozen seemed on the point of rushing to the spot, but suddenly changed their minds, and hung back; probably only one man was concealed there, still there might be a dozen.

A few guttural words from Hard-Heart, sharply spoken, and then half a dozen rifles poured their leaden rain into the bushes. But Arkansaw was not there to receive the bullets.

He laughed silently as he heard the reports. He had drawn their fire, and now he had nothing to fear.

He suddenly showed himself to them, to the south of the little camp. He had been loading up, and when they saw him he was in the act of drawing the ramrod from the barrel. Waving his hand in defiance, he dashed away, followed by angry cries of execration from some, while others of the Indians uttered ejaculations something akin to fear.

"It is the Trackless!" they gasped.

They had recognized the long, lank figure of this pale-face, who seemed able at any minute to cause his trail to disappear. The more superstitious among them were inclined to believe him a supernatural being.

Hard-Heart was not among the latter number, and uttering the battle cry, he dashed away in pursuit, followed by all but two or three of his men.

Arkansaw kept in advance, just beyond rifle range, at every opportunity allowing them to obtain a glimpse of him, and succeeded in this, as on a former occasion, in drawing attention away from the trail left by his companion.

On—on—they went, mile after mile, maintaining about the same distance apart. Arkansaw thought it about time to practice his peculiar tactics on his pursuers, but had as yet been unable to find a proper spot.

Tired, panting, nearly exhausted though the pursuers were, they stuck to the chase, for Hard-Heart was determined this time to put an end to the existence of the Trackless if he could possibly do so.

Hard-Heart's eyes were glowing and sternly set, his teeth gritted together, every muscle was tensely strained. He had much to avenge; the Trackless had killed many a brave, whose spirit called for vengeance.

If he could capture the Trackless alive, and put him to the torture? If he could—and his lips were drawn back like those of a snarling blood-hound, and the breath he drew hissed through his teeth.

On—on—up hill, down dale. On—on—through thicket, and wood, and open ground. On—on—ten, twelve, fifteen miles from the camp beside the creek. On—on—still on they went.

The country was becoming very flat, the thickets were less dense, the trees of more stunted growth and much fewer in number.

And then the trail was lost.

The Indians scattered, but hunt as they might they could not discover where it had disappeared, nor could they find where it again commenced.

With his brow black as a thundercloud, Hard-Heart sullenly started about in a circle, the size of which he gradually increased, hoping to strike a trail. At last he passed beneath the last tree extending toward the west, and gazed out over the stretch of prairie beyond, covered with a tall, rank growth of grass.

A crafty look came into his eyes, and a cruel smile wreathed his lips as a thought flashed into his brain.

Perhaps the Trackless had entered this grass, and was now concealed from sight in some little hollow, or was lying flat on his stomach.

He could observe no place where the grass was trampled or broken by being passed through. Still there was a chance that he might be hidden in it.

He gave a few orders, and at once the Indians separated.

Half an hour passed; an hour came and went. The hour became two.

Then there was a stir in the grass, and a

body might have been observed moving. A head was cautiously raised, and peered through, rather than over the heads of the grass.

It was Arkansaw.

He sighted Hard-Heart up in the tree, his eyes roving over the smooth prairie beyond him.

"I don't like this altogether," muttered Arkansaw, as he sank down flat on his stomach again. "Their suspicions are aroused, and there's some devilry the wind."

And there was.

He soon discovered its nature.

A flame of fire suddenly mounted heavenward near the tree where Hard-Heart was stationed.

"I must get out of this pretty gosh-darned lively," gasped Arkansaw. "They've fired the prairie, the devils."

He faced the west, and his cheek paled as his eyes encountered another flame rising there. He turned to one side and then to the other, and found fire there.

He was surrounded by fire, all leaping swiftly toward a common center—and that center himself!

"Well," he muttered, "I guess this fixes me. I've been in a good many tight boxes, but this is the worst yet. Yes, howl, ye bloody red devils!"—peering at them over the grass—"you've trapped the Trackless at last. I'm durned sorry now that I didn't put that bullet in Hard-Heart's noddle-box. Wonder if I couldn't fetch him now—I'd feel then as if I'd sorter squared accounts," and he raised his rifle and took a careful aim.

CHAPTER VII.

A GAME OF DODGE.

SLOWLY Arkansaw raised his rifle to bear on the figure of Hard-Heart, who was perched on a tree, scanning the burning level before him. With his finger on the trigger Arkansaw paused and flashed his eyes across the intervening space between himself and the bloodthirsty Indian chief.

It would be a pretty long shot.

He affectionately patted the stock of his rifle, an excellent one for those times.

"I know you'll do all you can," he muttered, as if the insensible object understood his words. "But I'm afraid it's a trifle beyond yer. However, I'll try."

He slapped the barrel to cause the powder to settle into the nipple, so that there would be no miss-fire. He was in the act of once more taking aim when he suddenly paused, raised himself up a trifle more, and took a long and scrutinizing look at the fire on all sides, which was closing in on him with the speed of a race horse.

Then a scornful smile parted his lips.

"I think I see a way out of this predicament that'll puzzle 'em wonderfully. I'll save the lead pill for yer, Hard-Heart, until another time. Now for the buff'ler."

A few hundred yards from the spot where he had crouched, Arkansaw had come across the body of a dead buffalo, partially skinned. Whoever had killed the animal had been frightened away before securing the skin.

To this spot Arkansaw swiftly crept on hands and knees. In a minute his keen hunting-knife was at work, and in a remarkably short time he had off the skin. Twenty or thirty feet away, the buffalo, in his dying agonies, had torn up and pawed the earth savagely, then had staggered until he fell where the scout had found him.

To this torn-up spot the scout hastened, and a cry of joy escaped his lips as he saw one hole that was large enough to accommodate his body and still leave it below the level of the earth. From the edges of this hole he frantically tore the grass—for the fire was dangerously near. Then he flung himself into the hole, and drew the buffalo skin over him, and its hot breath had already scorched his face and caused the hair on his head to shrivel at the ends.

None who have not witnessed a prairie on fire can imagine the fierce and rapid progress of the flames. Little fuel as the grass would seem to afford, it makes an excessively hot fire, and when it has passed leaves the ground over which it has run baked hard and dry, like half burned bricks, and so hot that a human being can hardly stand on it.

Crouched under the protecting skin, Arkansaw shuddered as with a roar it swept over his head. Yes, brave and hardy as he was,

the scout shuddered, and it was no disgrace.

Then the earth began to feel the effect of the flames, and became hot.

The contracted space in which he was became stifling. The air became heated until each drawn breath was like taking steam into his lungs.

And yet he hardly dared raise the skin.

Did he do so, he might be suffocated by the smoke made by the smoldering fire which was now consuming the roots of the grass, or he might invite an equally great danger—discovery by the keen eyes of the Indians which he knew were now roving over the burned vista.

The heat started the perspiration from every pore until it ran in little rivulets all over his body.

He gasped, at last, for breath.

Fresh air he must have.

He raised one corner of the skin. But he was hardly any better off, for the smoke began to curl through the opening, charged with the odor of burnt hair, the hairy side of the skin having been uppermost.

Hotter and hotter became the earth. To lie in one position was impossible, for the heat became intolerable. He put his hands down but quickly took them up, and felt of them, fearing the palms were all blistered.

Then occurred an accident he had never taken into account.

His rifle became so heated that it discharged itself.

The sharp crack was heard by the Indians and produced a rumbling shout of mingled astonishment and joy, and Hard-Heart's eyes moved more keenly over the space before him.

He discovered the carcass of the buffalo, and though he knew it was too large for that of a man, correctly judged it to be what it was; he reasoned that the scout might be lying flat on the ground back of it, and he uttered a shrill yell of satisfaction. The crack of the rifle had come from that direction, but he had been unable to distinguish the smoke from that arising from every side; living or dead—Hard-Heart was positive that Arkansaw was under the lee of the buffalo's carcass and down from his perch he slid.

A happy idea had struck the scout.

Moving carefully, he managed to drag the buffalo skin partially beneath him, and the soft fleshy side was gratefully cool.

Now he must see what was transpiring beyond him. At any cost it was necessary to learn.

Raising his head he peered over the skin and saw Hard-Heart as he stepped foot on earth again.

"They have discovered the carcass," muttered Arkansaw, as he saw the chief point in its direction. "What comes next on the programme? Ha! they are going to pay it a visit. I must make tracks for sartain."

He saw Hard-Heart and the Indians step on the smoking ground, and then hastily start back.

"Tenderfooted, hey?" laughed Arkansaw. "Well, so much the better, it will give me a little time in which to think over my desperate situation."

And desperate his situation really was.

The fires had been simultaneously started on all sides of him; consequently he was surrounded by Indians. To escape it would be necessary to pass through an open space in their lines, if he could determine where such a space existed. If he could not—if his judgment proved to be at fault—he must inevitably fall into their hands.

Slowly and carefully he began to sweep his eyes around an extended circle. He needed every minute he could obtain; still, haste at the present time would have been ruinous, and his movements were so leisurely that a person unacquainted with the circumstances would never have dreamed that this man was in mortal peril.

He located the points in the direction of the woods at which the several fires had been started, and then carefully scanned the space between these points in search of Indians. He must make for the woods again, he had decided within himself; to have plunged on across the open prairie would have been to invite the terrible fate he had just escaped, for though he could give the Indians odds and then distance them, he could not outstrip the flames. A race horse could not have done it.

"That is the spot I must make for," he muttered to himself, having settled which in

his mind, he again turned his attention to Hard-Heart.

The chief was just in the act of testing his ability to stand the heat of the ground. He found it bearable, and ordering his men to follow, sprang lightly in the direction of the carcass.

Setting his teeth firmly, Arkansaw first loaded his rifle. Then, flinging back the skin, his lank figure straightened itself to its great height.

Instantly he was observed, which fact was evidenced by a loud shout, and then they started forward like wolves eager to reach and rend their prey to shreds.

Up came the scout's rifle.

It was actually comical to see how suddenly the Indians halted as that dreaded weapon was brought to bear.

Arkansaw lightly laughed, gathered his muscles, then bounded away toward the woods, the air ringing with the whoops of his red enemies.

He glanced swiftly along the line of the woods, and at two points—just where the fires had been started—saw parties of redskins break cover and dash toward the point at which he was aiming, from which they were all nearly equally distant.

"I'm good for half a dozen yards, I guess," thought Arkansaw; "and, barring bullets, that's all I want any time."

It was an exciting few minutes which followed. The scout was putting forth every effort; never before had he ran as he did now. And the Indians were straining to the uttermost to head him off.

"Gained!" muttered Arkansaw, when he was within a dozen feet of the woods, and either party of the savages was as many yards away.

Unless they fired upon him, he felt safe.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Seeing how matters stood, the Indians began popping away at him eager to shoot him down ere he gained the cover of the woods. But their very eagerness and excitement defeated the purpose of their whistling bullets, although one of them came close enough to the mark to make Arkansaw shake his head as a dog does when he hears a bee buzzing about his ears; the bullet scraped the skin from the tip of his ear.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Then came a shrill cry of defiance.

Arkansaw, unharmed, had gained the cover of the woods. As we have said, they were very open here at the edge of the prairie land, and he was far from being actually safe yet, for there was little to intercept the course of a bullet.

His long legs never got over ground more rapidly than now. Away he sped, deeper into the woods, striving to reach a point several miles off, where the undergrowth began to thicken and the woods were more dense.

And after him the savages headlong dashed, howling like maddened and disappointed beasts of prey.

Tired, out of breath, far enough in advance to warrant it, Arkansaw at last paused to rest, leaning his shoulder against a giant tree. A dead silence prevailed save for his heavy breathing and the distant yell of his pursuers.

Some slight noise caused him to quickly face about. Behind him was an Indian, in whose glittering eyes was a flash of triumph, and a poised tomahawk was in the act of descending to cleave his skull in twain.

Like lightning the scout recoiled and placed the trunk of the tree between himself and the Indian. The latter hugged closely the other side of the trunk, and then the foes began—actuated by the same ideas—to slowly circle about the tree, waiting an opportunity to deal a fatal blow. It was a game of dodge!

CHAPTER VIII.

ALONE IN THE WOODS.

FOR a full minute after the handle of his tomahawk was cleft in twain by Arkansaw's bullet, Lightning gazed at the stump in his hand, a deeply puzzled expression on his face.

Then the words of Hard-Heart, the shout which followed, enabled him to comprehend how it had happened.

When he saw Arkansaw expose himself to their view, he, like the rest, was fired with a

mad desire to kill this Trackless, who so boldly bearded the lion, who flung defiance in their teeth, and like a shot he was off in the wild chase which followed.

He had, however, gone but a very short distance when a thought of his prisoner flashed across his mind, and halting suddenly he began retracing his steps.

He reached the spot in time to catch an Indian, who had craftily hung in the rear, in the act of braining the girl.

"Hold!" cried Lightning, sternly. "Is the Wolf a thief that he would steal the scalp that belongs to another?"

The Indian turned swiftly toward the speaker, and though he delayed the intended stroke, did not release his clutch of the girl.

"It is now the scalp of the Wolf," was the surly reply. "The Lightning deserted her. She was running away when the Wolf crossed her trail and captured her."

"It is false! I left her where she now stands. She has not moved a step since I left her. Let the Wolf find scalps for himself," and with sternly set face, Lightning advanced and also took hold of the frightened girl.

"This is my scalp," was the stubborn reply, "and I mean to have it. Why did not my brother take it when the fire was burning yonder? He was faint-hearted. Lightning has the heart of a dog—he is not an Indian—but is a pale-face and a squaw."

The Wolf had overheard Hard-Heart's words, and thought it possible to browbeat the young Indian out of his captive.

"Let my brother go back to where our lodges are raised—he can help the squaws when they plant the corn again."

A lurid light had leaped into Lightning's eyes at the first of these insults, but at the last one, every fiber of his being was thrilled with fire and passion.

"The Wolf is a lying dog—let him die!" hissed Lightning, snatching out his keen knife.

Again the tomahawk was raised, this time for Lightning's benefit.

Each released his hold of the girl, and then they faced each other, blazing with passion, thirsting for each other's life-blood. The girl, overcome by terror, sank to the ground, and remained a silent and horrified witness to the terrible combat which followed.

"Let the Wolf fling away his tomahawk and draw his knife," said Lightning, haughtily. "Yonder is the prize—she shall be mine or yours. The brave will have her to himself—the squaw will go to the happy hunting grounds."

The Wolf was an older and more experienced fighter, had been before on the war-path, and he felt a certain contempt for this untried stripling; besides this, there was an old animosity arising from a rivalry for Sunlight's hand.

"So let it be," he coolly said, and threw away his tomahawk, then drew his knife. "Sunlight will mourn one moon, and then will enter the lodge of the Wolf."

A scornful look was Lightning's only reply. Then they crouched slightly, and with eyes fastened on each other, slowly drew nearer, going around and around, transcribing a gradually contracting circle.

It was a scene to hold a witness spell-bound.

Not a sound broke the silence save that of their breath, drawn through clenched teeth, with a low hissing sound.

One made a feint; the other followed suit a moment later. Around and around, wary, watchful—waiting an opportunity to rush and end each other's life.

Clash!

The gleaming blades met.

The ball was opened. Fast and furious the blades now flew, glinting and flashing when kissed by the sunlight which struggled down through the leafy trees.

Clash! clash!

Then they close and clasp in each other's arms hugged tightly. Thus they remained for fully five minutes, motionless almost as statues. Thus interlocked, neither could strike a blow. The moment of breaking loose the chances were that one or the other must fall, and he who exerted himself to break the lock had the chances against him.

Panting, each reeling the hot breath of the other on his cheek, the glowing eyes separated by only a few inches and glaring fixedly, they formed a picture worthy of being immortalized in enduring marble.

Once the Wolf made a feint of breaking away, but so swiftly did Lightning respond to the movement that he tightened instead of breaking the lock. He had learned that he had misjudged his antagonist, that he had found a foe in every inch his equal.

Cautiously now but steadily, inch by inch, Lightning forced the Wolf backward. The latter tried to prevent this, but the ground sloped just here, and Lightning was raised a little above him. Then the Wolf tried to turn aside, but found it impossible.

What was behind him? What idea led Lightning to force him backward?

These questions puzzled the Wolf.

He must see what danger threatened him from the rear—it was essential that he should. He must break away at all costs.

Craftily preparing himself, fancying that he was hoodwinking Lightning, he suddenly gathered his muscles and broke the lock. But Lightning was ready and waiting—his hunting-knife described a swift circle above his head, and then was buried to the hilt in the Wolf's breast.

The knife had reached his heart, and he fell like a log. The intense, silent, but terribly exciting battle was ended.

The passion slowly faded from Lightning's face as he stood beside the body of his late antagonist and gazed fixedly down on it.

"It is bad that Indians should slay each other, when every strong arm is needed to drive the pale-faces from our hunting-grounds. But he had no right to try to steal the scalp of my captive. And he called me a dog—a squaw;" and then a savage, satirical smile parted his lips, as much as to say: "Who is now the warrior and who the squaw?"

Then he turned a gloomy brow and moody look toward the girl who had been the indirect cause of the fight.

"Spare me!" pleaded the girl, falling on her knees and clasping her hands, aware that he was then deciding in his mind what her fate was to be.

Twice he had recently been taunted with having the skin of a white man, and in his memory was still fresh the scene at Fort Platt, when a white squaw had claimed to be his mother. He had always believed himself to be an Indian, but marked with a white skin, significant of the fact that his red ancestors had displeased their Manitou. Had his mother been a pale-face woman? Had he been lied to? And then he asked himself why he hesitated to kill women and children when the other braves did not? If they did it, it must be right; and yet the greater nobleness, inherited with his white blood, cried out against slaughtering those helpless beings.

Drawing aside his leggings, exposing his leg, he brusquely demanded:

"Dat pale-face skin?"

"Yes—yes," was the eager reply. "Thank Heaven, you are not an Indian, but a white man."

He bent a look of scorn on her.

"Lightning is an Indian," he said, haughtily, and then pointing toward the depths of the woods, he cried, sternly: "Go!"

Mary McGrath struggled to her feet and hurried away in the direction indicated. Once only she glanced behind her, and then it was only to see Lightning standing there, gloomy-browed, stern-looking, erect and rigid, his arms folded across his breast. His savage, unyielding appearance alarmed her lest he should repent, and she called on her trembling limbs to as swiftly carry her away from the spot as they were capable of doing.

She never paused in her flight until exhaustion compelled her to do so.

Night came on and found her in a deep glen, nearly impenetrable for anything except a wild beast.

And here, crouching down at the foot of a tree, she passed the night, her mind filled with terror by the howls of the wild animals which roamed the forest.

When daylight broke she struggled to her feet and sought to extricate herself from the glen's impassable thickets. With day's coming her courage had revived, and she had sense enough to mark out and lay her course by the sun.

All day she battled bravely on toward the home that was now in ashes, but night overtook her once more while yet in the woods. Since the attack on her home, food had not crossed her lips, and she was famished and weak.

What a night that was!

Had any of the beasts of prey come across her, she would have fallen an easy prey, for, woman as she was, sleep stole upon her.

The next day she spent in searching for food, but the only edible things she found were a few berries. The day following hunger's pangs nearly drove her crazy, and she grubbed in the earth for roots until her hands were all torn and bleeding.

Yet she still clung to hope.

"I must go on," she told herself. "I must not pause again until I reach the Platt clearing, to search for food or anything else;" and bringing her will power to bear, the poor girl struggled bravely on, never flagging until the conviction forced itself upon her mind that she must have traveled more miles than laid between Fort Platt and the spot where Lightning had set her free.

Then her spirits flagged; still she pressed on until too weak to take another step. She had done her best. It was of no use. Faint—exhausted, she sank down, prepared to die, and only praying Heaven that her release from life might be speedy.

CHAPTER IX.

ON GABE'S TRAIL.

LIGHTNING saw the girl disappear, then stood for several minutes gazing in a blank way at the spot where he had seen the last of her. Next he turned about, took up the tomahawk flung down by Wolf, thrust its handle in his belt, and mechanically followed the trail left by those who had gone in pursuit of Arkansaw.

Slowly and thoughtfully he went along, his mind filled with unpleasant reflections.

Hard-Heart would question him concerning his prisoner. What should he say? Dared he admit that he had spared the life of a hated pale-face?

And the Wolf, too, would be missed.

Being found at that spot, would he not be accused of slaying him?

He was now in no hurry to join Hard-Heart's party.

Suddenly the moody look in his eyes was replaced by one of savage glee.

In the distance he could hear the yells of his comrades. Right before him he saw Trackless in the act of leaning his shoulder against the trunk of a tree.

He could not fight women and babes, but he had the heart of a brave when he could meet a man. His eyes sparkled with anticipation.

If he could kill Trackless his reputation would be made. Could he show the scalp of this dreaded man he would at once be taken into the councils of the tribe. The old men would respect him, the young ones look up to him with wonder and awe. And Sunlight, the daughter of Hard-Heart, would at once come to sit in his lodge.

The scout's back was toward him.

Everything was favorable.

Noiseless as a cat in his movements, Lightning cautiously approached the scout, who stood all unconscious that an enemy was near.

Nearer—nearer, an exultant expression on his face, the Indian drew.

The tomahawk was in his hand, ready to perform its bloody work.

Finally he was within arm's length of the dreaded Trackless, and as yet he had not been alarmed. Lightning's face was all aglow with satisfaction; this alone was a wonderful feat.

He raised the tomahawk, but in bracing his feet to impart the necessary force to the blow, the Indian made the slight noise which had aroused Arkansaw to a knowledge of his danger, and as before described, the scout had speedily placed the trunk of the tree between them.

Then began a peculiar battle.

Each of them endeavored to obtain a glimpse of his enemy, yet without exposing himself, for each knew that the other was on the alert.

Arkansaw tested this by putting his cap on the muzzle of his rifle and then projecting it an inch or two beyond the greatest diameter of the tree. So naturally did the skin cap come into view that Lightning was positive that a head was inside of it and at once went for it with his tomahawk.

Clash—h—h—snap!

The scout laughed.

He had lost a cap, but his enemy had lost his most available weapon, his tomahawk.

Presently the Indian's scalp-lock, dressed up with feathers, came within the line of Arkansasaw's vision.

At first he thought the Indian was practicing the same deception on him; a minute later he became satisfied that the Indian was circling about the tree a little faster than he was, and that the scalp-lock was fast in his head.

Grasping his knife firmly the scout prepared to grasp the scalp-lock with his free hand, yank its owner off his pins and finish him up in short order.

He made a grasp for the scalp-lock, his fingers closed about it—the Indian's artifice nearly cost the scout his hand. As Arkansasaw grasped the feathers, Lightning had made a quick stroke with his knife at his antagonist's wrist.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the scout aloud; "we're even, redskin. Tit for tat—that's what I like."

But Lightning made no reply, only looked more grim as he attempted to draw the other's fire to no purpose, or get a sure shot himself.

Neither of them dared make a dash away from the tree, for a bullet would have overtaken him before he could have gained a safe cover. And around the tree they cautiously went, guided by the sense of hearing alone, neither ever obtaining a glimpse of the other.

It would have been an even fight had not it been that Arkansasaw's pursuers were rapidly drawing nearer. Their reaching the spot would settle the business unless it was settled before.

The cold perspiration started from Arkansasaw's every pore.

Nearer and nearer those yells were drawing. The situation was growing desperate. Something must be done, and speedily at that.

It is said that desperate cases require desperate remedies, and this is very near to the truth.

Suddenly uttering a whoop, he bounded away from the tree. A swift glance showed him that the Indian's rifle was ready for business.

Crack! Whiz-z-z-z!

The bullet cut only thin air. The scout had dropped in time to allow the leaden messenger to fly above his head.

Up came his own rifle now.

His finger was on the trigger; his eyes flashed along the barrel. The muzzle wavered a little—then fell—and instead of shooting he hurled himself on his late antagonist.

He bore Lightning to the earth and pinned him there, then drew and raised his knife as if to strike.

"You are Lightning," said the scout. "If I spare you, will you spare me should my life ever be at your disposal?"

"No," was the sullen reply. "Strike!"

An Indian is rarely found who fears death. Arkansasaw was nonplused. On the very point of putting a bullet into the lad he had recognized him as the son of Mrs. Platt, and had spared him. He could not kill him now, in face of the promise he had given to that distressed mother.

"Lightning is a great brave!" said Arkansasaw, adopting a new line. "A brave man is always generous. See! I now give you your life. I shall leave you now, and Lightning is not the brave I think him to be if he now tries to follow me or put his brothers on my track. I will tell your pale-face mother that I have seen you, and that you are a brave son."

Lightning had arisen to his feet, and with folded arms silently watched the rapidly diminishing figure of the scout as he widened the distance between them. The pursuing Indians were some distance away, on a line parallel with Lightning, a single cry from whom would have put the whole blood-thirsty pack on the scout's very heels; but the cry was not uttered. Lightning had been put on his honor, and was as true as the high spirited officer who is on parole.

And yet he now hated the Trackless, as he called him, as he had never before hated man or beast. But he would not betray him for all that; no, he would remember the humiliation of having been vanquished, and at some future day would square the account.

"I knew I'd fetch him," muttered Arkansasaw. "Put a high-minded Indian kinder on his parole and you can depend on him. Poor little Joe, I used to dandle him on my knee, and he used to put his arm about my neck

and tell me he 'loved me a bushel.' And today he has tried to kill me. But," dashing away a tear brought to his eyes by the reflection. "I mustn't be a baby myself, but must attend to bizness. The first pint, I suppose, is to find out what's become of the gal."

Knowing the woods like a book he had no difficulty in following a course which brought him to the spot where the Indians had halted.

More than half expecting to find the mangled body of the girl, he was agreeably surprised when the expected sight did not meet his eyes; and when he found the girl's trail, going off by itself, his joy knew no bounds. She had escaped, he concluded.

The Indians were close at hand, and he promptly bade adieu to the spot, after having paused in surprise for one instant beside the dead body of the Wolf.

Once again the Indians halted here.

A death-wail announced the finding of the dead Indian's body.

"Where is Lightning?" demanded Hard-Heart, with flashing eyes.

"He is here."

"Where is your captive?"

"She is gone."

"How did it happen?" in an angry tone.

"I forgot all about her and started with the others in pursuit of the Trackless."

"Wagh! And who killed the Wolf?"

"Has Hard-Heart eyes?"

"He has."

"Then let him use them. The Trackless was not alone."

Lightning would have scorned the telling of a direct lie, but a subterfuge such as he now employed was considered a mark of ability, and he did not hesitate to mislead by using it. He had by chance discovered Gabe Wickett's trail, and the others, put on the scent by the reply, were not long in also finding it.

A short council was held.

Again had the Trackless balked them, but his companion had left a broad and clumsy trail behind. They might still be able to capture him, and wreak on him the fury occasioned by their previous disappointment.

This was the substance of the consultation.

Then Hard-Heart gave the word.

Like blood-hounds they now started on the new scent.

Brave as a lion, many years a frontiersman, Gabe Wickett was still deficient in woodcraft, and though he had once or twice paused and attempted to blind and cover his trail, his methods were all so simple that shrewd Hard-Heart saw through them every time.

"We will soon be upon the pale-face dog!" exultantly said the chief, when he stopped to examine some footprints in a spongy soil.

Gabe, in fancied security, sat smoking his pipe at the Hole-in-the-rock.

His dream of safety was suddenly and startlingly dispelled.

Crack!

A bullet, intended to enter the side of his head, carried the pipe from between his teeth.

With the quickness of a spring uncoiling, he reached an erect position. He swept a swift glance over the scene, then stepped back to the dark hole in the solid rock.

Crack!

They saw him totter and fall, and then with a wild yell of savage glee and anticipation they rushed forward to secure their prey.

CHAPTER X.

ARKANSAW TO THE RESCUE.

QUIETLY sitting there smoking his pipe, and wondering when Arkansasaw would show up, Gabe Wickett was a much surprised man, when a bullet suddenly whistled by within an inch of his head.

With a spasmodic motion his legs straightened, and he stood erect; his mouth involuntarily opened, allowing the pipe to fall at his feet.

Then he caught a glimpse of the Indians and saw his danger.

Crack!

He was just on the point of facing about to spring into the hole, when a second bullet actually skinned his nose. The sting and pain caused him to move so quickly that he caught his heel, lost his balance, and fell. He made no attempt to recover his equilibrium, but

instead gave himself a throw which carried him within the Hole-in-the-rock, and which produced on the minds of the Indians the impression that the bullet had performed the fatal mission on which it had been sent.

They speedily learned how great was their mistake.

Though deficient in woodcraft, there was not an atom of Gabe Wickett's being that was not brave to the last degree.

"The varmints," he growled, as he quickly got upon his feet and grasped his rifle with a firm hand. "I thought I had covered my trail; but I couldn't a-done so, or they wouldn't be here. Well, they've got me cornered, but before they raise my hair I'll give 'em some occasion for mourning."

Shouting madly, exultantly, believing the brave fellow dead, the Indians came rushing toward the Hole-in-the-rock.

Crack!

They had caught a glimpse of the rifle as it was raised, and in wholesome fear some of them had paused. But others dashed on, and the leader fell in his tracks.

The others involuntarily halted.

With steady hand, every movement showing that Gabe was as cool as a cucumber, he swiftly reloaded his rifle, never losing so much as a grain of powder.

"Now, I'm ready for yer again," he muttered. "Why don't yer come on, ye pesky devils?"

"On!" cried Hard-Heart in the Indian tongue. "Don't give him time to load up again," and onward the redskins dashed again.

Gabe held his fire until the leader was within ten feet of the rock, and then he let his rifle speak.

A second Indian fell, the sight of which made Hard-Heart a howling fiend.

In attempting to secure the scalp of one white man two of his braves had already fallen.

He sprang into the opening, but another Indian was ahead, a fact which saved the chief's life, for at a point where there was an angle in the rapidly contracting passage, Gabe Wickett stood, knife in hand.

The hunter could not be seen by the Indian until the latter was within arm's length. Then it was too late to save himself. The keen knife flashed swiftly over Gabe's head, and then was plunged hilt deep into the Indian's breast.

Like a wolf at bay Hard-Heart paused. He dared not go forward and encounter that keen knife which had robbed his warrior of life. Hidden behind the angle as Gabe was, Hard-Heart could neither shoot nor throw his tomahawk at him.

The chief knew that Gabe's rifle was unloaded, that his knife was his only weapon, and consequently did not feel called upon to beat a hasty retreat.

Still he could not advance.

Finally he caught hold of the dead brave and backed out to the entrance, and the body was placed beside the other two.

Sullenly Hard-Heart stood for a few minutes gazing into that dark hole. Then he ordered two of his braves to go on top of the rock where they could see the entrance, to guard it, and if Gabe showed himself to shoot him down.

He then called the others to one side, out of range of a shot from the interior of the cave, and asked for opinions from the others as to what course should be pursued.

It was clear that the place could not be carried by an assault, even though guarded by only one man; and, indeed, Gabe could easily have kept a thousand of them at bay.

They must resort to strategy, Hard-Heart told them, and presently a plan was formed.

Gabe Wickett was shrewd enough not to leave his point of vantage behind the angle in the passage. He knew that the Indians would be posted so as to command the entrance, and so he concluded to remain where he was.

"I wonder what the pesky brutes are up to now?" he muttered, on hearing some sounds which he could not understand, and peering cautiously around the angle he became aware of the fact that the entrance was being darkened by some means.

In reality the Indians were engaged in carrying and piling dry brush before the entrance, but Gabe was uncertain as to what they were doing, until after it had been set fire to.

Then the crackling of the dry twigs, the

rising flames, and the smoke which began to penetrate into the hole in the rock, informed him.

"Jehosaphat!" he gasped. "The devils are going to make a ham of me, or smoke me out."

With an anxious heart Gabe waited for the result of this novel mode of warfare.

He had strong hopes that, as there was no draught through the cave, it would not fill with smoke.

But for some reason—he afterward understood it—the cave began slowly but surely filling with the smoke from the fire, more especially after the Indians began to throw on damp wood, which produces ten-fold as much smoke as dry wood.

Much against his will, Gabe was finally forced to admit to himself that the situation was becoming desperate, for he could no longer breathe standing up, and was compelled to go down on his knees.

More and more dense became the smoke in the cave, and lower and lower he bent, until his lips almost touched the earthy floor.

Even then every breath that was drawn carried a large quantity of smoke into his lungs, nearly suffocating him. But he could stand it yet. If it grew no worse he would come out all right, for if he could only keep them at bay for awhile Arkansaw would arrive and rescue him.

That Arkansaw, knowing of his strait, could release him from it, Gabe had no doubt.

His faith in Arkansaw's resources was unbounded, and Gabe honestly believed the scout to be the greatest man who had ever lived and had a being.

Finally Gabe got a larger mouthful of smoke than usual, and it set him to coughing violently, and choked him until he was almost black in the face.

Above the crackle and roar of the flames, the Indians heard the welcome sound, and yelled with delight, then spread themselves, and clutched their weapons tightly, and fastened their glaring eyes eagerly on the entrance, watching for the moment when he would be compelled to break cover.

But Gabe conquered the suffocation, and now drew his breath with his lips glued to the earth.

Still the smoke was pouring into the cave, until at last it was impossible to breathe at all, in any position, under any circumstances.

The last act in the drama was at hand.

It had finally reached a juncture where he must choose one of two things—either to dash from the cave and run the risk of being shot and killed, or captured and bound at the stake, or else to remain where he was, and die by strangulation.

"The devils!" he thought, as fearful pains began to dart through his chest, warning him that he was beginning to suffocate in real earnest. "The devils! I can't lie here and die like a worn out dog!" and then a grim look came into his face. "They shall pay dearly for my scalp. Already I've downed three of the murdering fiends. If I dash out suddenly, I'm good for at least one more with my rifle, and perhaps another with my knife. That will be five. Even Arkansaw couldn't feel ashamed of that."

Cocking his rifle, and loosening the knife in his belt, Gabe prepared to arise to his feet, sternly resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible.

In another minute he would have been dashing out of the cave, had not his attention been arrested by a peculiar sound like that of the rattle of loose stones. And then—

"Gabe—Gabe!" in a low tone.

Gabe had retreated to the furthest extremity of the cave, and the voice was separated from him only by a couple of feet.

"Gabe—Gabe!"

"Arkansaw!" he gasped, in a thankful voice. "Hurry up—I'm smothering!"

The rattle of stones increased, and presently he could dimly see a hand thrust through, where, but a few moments before, to all appearances, had been a solid wall. Presently the aperture was large enough, and Gabe crept through.

"I carried these loose stones in here and piled 'em up," said Arkansaw, in a low tone of explanation. "I didn't know but that I'd get cornered here some day, and provided means of escape. Phew! The draught carries the smoke through here quite lively. It's a wonder the varmints hain't discovered the smoke coming out of the other end of the

hole. In with the stones—it'll only take a minute. So—the wall's as good as ever. Now, come on. Thunder! Hear 'em yell! They have seen the smoke arising from the other end. Lively, Gabe—lively, or, instead of one, there'll be two of us in a box!"

CHAPTER XI.

MARY M'GRATH.

THIS cave, or as Arkansaw called it, Hole-in-the-rock, was really a passage of varying dimensions, its two entrances separated by a distance of several hundred yards. The half of the cave before which the fire was burning was much larger in its dimensions, and the section of it in which the two comrades now were, was so contracted that they were compelled to go on their hands and knees to where it emerged in a clump of bushes.

When near the outlet Arkansaw paused to listen.

Still the Indians were yelling, but he could discover no rush of feet toward the spot where he and Gabe would emerge.

It puzzled him greatly to account for the yell, for it was one of triumph, as he well knew, from his acquaintance with the Indian tongue, and he could imagine no other reason for it save the discovery of the smoke, which would have informed them of another entrance to the cave.

But his face soon lighted, for the cries of anticipation and joy were followed by others of disappointment.

Looking steadily at the fire had blurred the sight of the Indians, one of whom had started the cries of triumph when he thought he saw Gabe Wickett's form back of the flames and the scout preparing to dash out, while in reality he had seen but a shadow or a more dense mass of smoke.

"We have no time to lose," said Arkansaw, in a low tone. "Be careful, pard, and follow my every movement."

Having thus cautioned Gabe, Arkansaw emerged from the contracted outlet and entered the bushes. In a few fleeting seconds Gabe was beside him.

Then the scout parted the bushes after a minute's careful scrutiny of the ground around, and crept out, followed by Gabe.

"It's curious they hain't seen the smoke from the opening on this end," muttered the scout, pausing to look back when he had gained a distance which placed him in comparative safety.

Between the two outlets to the cave stood several large and fully leaved trees, which as Arkansaw now saw, formed a perfect veil to the eyes of the eager Indians watching the fire; and by the time that the small amount of smoke rose above the tops of the trees it was so dissipated in the air as to be hardly visible even on close scrutiny.

"Good!" and Arkansaw laughed in that silent and peculiar way of his.

"What is it?" asked Gabe, who had by this time got the strangling smoke out of his lungs and was nearly himself once more.

"Seeing you don't come out the Ingins will let their fire go out and then enter the Hole-in-the-rock. They'll find it empty and won't know how in thunder to account for it. Haha! won't it rile up old Hard-Heart!"

"Well, pard," and Gabe shuddered a little. "I'm pesky glad I'm out of the hole and won't be there to receive 'em. But how did yer get here just in the nick of time?"

In a few words Arkansaw related what had occurred to him since their parting; the chase, the prairie fire, the tree fight with Lightning, the discovery that Mary McGrath had not been murdered.

"I was on her trail—poor girl, how she must have been frightened! She thought she was makin' straight tracks for home, but her trail was crooked as a ram's horn. I followed its windings, which led me near enough to this spot to hear the crack of your rifle. Knowing that something had turned up, I put for here, seed the Ingins and the fire, and you know the rest yourself."

"And what's to be done now?" inquired Gabe, thoughtfully.

"Look after the girl, in course. Poor Mike McGrath! He was the best-hearted Irishman I ever came across, and for the sake of old times I'm bound to do all I can for his sister."

"Well, I've got my wind again."

"Then we'll be off. Good-bye, Hard-Heart," mockingly nodding his head toward the distant Indians, and then he and Gabe silently

wended their way through the woods, being careful to blind their trail.

As Arkansaw had prophesied, the Indians finally let the fire die out, certain that as Gabe had not come out he had been suffocated.

Hard-Heart would rather have taken him alive and then tortured him to death, to in some measure requite them for the loss of three of their number; still, it was better to have him dead than living; his scalp was better than nothing at all.

Where the fire had burned the rock was too hot to stand upon; but leaping this, the Indians entered the hole in the rock, which they still found filled with smoke, so much so that they were compelled to retire for the present.

An hour afterward they were able to explore it to its furthest corner, and a surprised lot of Indians they were when they found the cave empty, when they failed to discover the body of the enemy who had killed three of their braves.

Torches were lit to enable them to scan the interior more closely; he might have crawled into some hole and died, reasoned Hard-Heart. But no—Gabe had vanished completely.

Where had he gone?

They could discover no means by which he could have escaped except by the entrance before which they had built the fire, and he surely had not passed that.

The mystery of the affair created a deep impression on most of those superstitious children of the forest, and when they were again outside of the cave, they gazed at each other with awe-struck faces.

"Wagh!" grunted one. "Trackless is in league with the spirits of the air, and this was his companion."

Hard-Heart, puzzled more than he cared to admit to himself, was nevertheless satisfied that Gabe's escape was in some wise due to human, and not to a supernatural agency. Yet he could offer no explanation, could not even suggest one to combat the awe and fear of the Trackless and his companion which was rapidly growing in the minds of his braves.

As he had so successfully done on former occasions, he tried to draw their minds from a contemplation of their present disaster, by picturing the terrible vengeance which they would cause to descend at some future time on the heads of the hated pale-faces. And he proposed that they should return to the vicinity of Fort Platt at once, and endeavor to swell the number of scalps taken beyond the number of braves who had fallen.

When he had finished, one of the oldest and most experienced braves stepped forward.

A profound silence followed.

"Has the courage of Long-Knife ever been questioned?" he finally asked.

"None dare question it," answered Hard-Heart. "The scalps in my brother's wigwam all have silent but speaking tongues."

"It is well! Long-Knife never yet feared to meet an Indian foe or a pale-face one, that lived by eating, that drank by the flowing brook, that breathed as I do, whose blood flowed when the knife was drawn, whose heart beat behind solid flesh. But Long-Knife wishes not to meet the Trackless, for he is not one of these. Nor is his pale-face brother, whom we saw enter yon cave—who never came forth, yet is not there. I have done."

A murmur of satisfaction greeted his speech, and do what Hard-Heart might, he could not stem the tide—it could not be done.

They refused to return to Fort Platt.

The place was under the special care of the Trackless, a victory would be impossible. So they believed, and they determined to uselessly shed no more blood, and Hard-Heart was compelled to yield and lead them back into the forest wilds.

Three days later they reached their village. Of the party which had dug up the hatchet and started away in all the glory of war-paint, only one-third of the number returned and they came back nearly empty-handed, and therefore were met with wails of grief instead of shouts of joy.

Beside a spring in the woods Lightning found Sunlight, as fair and beautiful an Indian maid as ever the sun shone on. With

a step as light as a fawn's she came to where he was standing, moody-faced, with arms folded over his breast; and her dark eyes eagerly scanned his face, waiting for a look of recognition.

"Has Lightning no soft words for the Sunlight, which has been dimmed during his absence, but now shines brightly again?"

"The Lightning has been but a snail in his pace."

"And has brought back no scalps?" inquired the girl, glancing toward his belt.

"No."

"Did you not remember me, and your arm grow strong to strike? A single scalp, and Sunlight would have entered your wigwam. Could you not get even one?"

"Yes—a woman's. But I cannot kill women and babes. I have tried and failed. Sunlight thinks me a coward—a squaw?"

"No," was the reply. Sunlight may have been an exception among Indian women, but certainly she had no sympathy for the brave whose only scalps were those of women and children. "The Lightning is a great brave and there should hang at his belt the scalps of none but great braves. I can wait."

"And you will not go into the lodge of any other brave?"

"No."

He looked earnestly at her, and as he did so there suddenly flashed across his mind a recollection of the girl he had liberated, Mary McGrath. And he wondered where she was as he slowly entered the village. Had she escaped safely? Was she with her pale-face friends?

Poor Mary McGrath.

Like the brave and plucky girl she was she had struggled on until she could struggle no longer from lack of strength, and then, without hope, unaware that friends were every hour drawing near to her, she had laid herself down to die, her prayer being that death might release her from her sufferings.

Sleep had mercifully eased her a little; and it was while she slept that Arkansaw and Gabe reached the end of the trail and found her.

CHAPTER XII.

ATTACKED AGAIN.

MARY M'GRATH'S slumber was not broken into, but she was allowed to sleep until she awoke of herself.

She could hardly understand it, when on opening her eyes she found Arkansaw and Gabe sitting on a log a little distance away. Sitting up, she rubbed her eyes, stared about her, then fastened her gaze wonderingly at Arkansaw, whom she knew.

"How came you here?" she finally asked, in a puzzled tone.

"Oh, I didn't know but what yer might want some help to find your way home, so Gabe and me come in search of yer."

"You have saved my life!" impulsively cried the girl. "I had laid myself down to die. I was starving and exhausted."

"And where do you want to go?" asked Arkansaw, in a kind tone.

"Anywhere," and the tears started to the poor girl's eyes. "I have no home now—it is in ashes, and they are all dead."

Fortunately the scout had some liquor with him, of which he gave the girl a swallow or two, after which he gave her some food.

When she was sufficiently recovered to be able to walk at all, they started for Fort Platt, which the scout had concluded would be the best place to take her to.

"And how far is it?" asked the girl.

"Only a matter of half a dozen miles."

"And only to think that after coming so far I should have given up hope, have laid down to die, when so near to friends," and then the girl shuddered visibly.

Supported on one side by the scout, on the other by Gabe, she was enabled to reach Fort Platt just before dark.

"Bring her in—bring her in, Arkansaw," said big-hearted John Platt. "I guess we can find room for her and enough for her to eat."

"God bless you all," sobbed poor Mary, touched by the kindness of the Platts.

They made her undress and lie down, and then they bathed and bound up her lacerated flesh, and brought for her to eat all the good things they had in the house.

"What about the Injins, Arkansaw?" inquired John Platt, after the scout had eaten a

heartily meal. "We keep sentinels posted all night long yet."

"That is right. To neglect a guard might cost you all your lives. However, I don't think that Hard-Heart will give you any trouble again for some time. The lesson they got here, and the losses they've had since, will take the fight out of 'em for awhile. But now about this girl."

"What about her?" demanded Platt.

"Will you see that she is taken care of?"

"Will I? Of course, Arkansaw; of course I will. She shall live with my family as long as she wishes to do so. Poor Mikel! That was tough, wasn't it—the way the redskins butchered that family?"

"It was," replied the scout, turning away and going in quest of Mrs. Platt, who had just then came from the bedside of Mary McGrath, who had told her the story of that dreadful night and all that followed.

"Arkansaw, wasn't it strange that an Indian should voluntarily let the girl escape unharmed?" she asked, her mind filled with the girl's story.

"For an Indian it would have been very queer," was the reply.

The emphasis he bestowed on the word Indian was noticed by Mrs. Platt.

She glanced quickly at him.

"What do you mean? Was it—"

She paused, agitated, her eyes assuming an appealing expression.

"Her captor was your son," said Arkansaw, gravely.

"And he let her go. Thank God for even that much, that he did not raise his hand against a woman. Arkansaw—do you know—can you tell me—" she spoke with difficulty—"has he imbued his hands in the blood of his own race?"

"He has not."

"And he was alive and well when you saw him?" eagerly.

"He was."

The scout and Gabe passed the night at the fort, but were up and away bright and early the next morning.

At first Arkansaw was going to leave without saying a word to any one, but he changed his mind and went to the house of the Platts. Mrs. Platt was already stirring, although it was hardly more than daylight.

Arkansaw glanced around, but his eyes did not find what they searched for—Floy Raynor. For some reason—perhaps because Floy had tried to keep out of his way—he had only once caught a glimpse of her the evening before, and had not exchanged a word with her.

"Tell Floy 'good-bye' for me," said Arkansaw, and then he added, in an embarrassed manner—"and all the others, too. Come, pard," and then he and Gabe passed through the gate of the stockade, and soon were swallowed up in the forest depths.

His purpose in now leaving the fort was to learn what had become of the Indians.

They reached the Hole-in-the-rock in due season, and there took up and followed the trail of the retreating Indians, tracking them to the very outskirts of their village.

Infact, they approached it so closely as to be able to distinguish and recognize faces, and at sight of Hard-Heart, moodily and sulkily striding through the village, the scout enjoyed a hearty laugh.

For nearly a week they hung about the outskirts of the village, frequently crawling close to the outermost huts during the dark hours of the night, to see if they could hear anything that passed inside.

Arkansaw was finally rewarded for his labor by overhearing a conversation which set all his doubts at rest.

At once he and Gabe started over the back track to the fort.

"You are safe enough now," he told John Platt. "They have returned to their village, and will not stir from it to go on the war-path until next spring. Of that I am very sure, but when spring opens be on your guard, for Hard-Heart is a vengeful devil, and never forgets or forgives."

"Arkansaw, don't you think we could get together a band of men, march to their village, and wipe 'em off the face of the earth?"

The scout smiled grimly.

"If yer want ter leave yer wife a widder and yer children orphans, it's a good plan." Then more soberly: "No, old man, the distance is too great, beside being very rough. Their scouts would learn of our approach,

and we'd be ambushed as surely as that we shall surely die."

"Well—well, let it drop. Come to the house now. You'll stay with us until spring?"

"Not by any means. Gabe and me are going off hunting and trapping together. How are you, little one?" this last to Floy, whom they had unexpectedly encountered, and who stood before them blushing a rose red.

"How do you do, Arkansaw?" and she timidly put out her hand.

When he and Gabe bade good-bye to the fort again, not to see it for a couple of months at the least, Floy did not again evade the scout.

"Good-bye," she said, in a trembling voice, and then, nervously—"I wish you were going to stay. You may be killed."

"And would little Floy care much?"

"A little," she finally admitted, and when he took her up in his long arms and gave her a bearish hug and a kiss, she did not say him nay.

"Are yer hard hit, pard?" slyly inquired Gabe, when the fort was left behind.

"Don't poke no fun, Gabe. I don't understand it like, but there's something about that little gal, Floy, which pulls and tugs kinder painful here," putting his hand above his heart. "If I wasn't such a rough fellow, and such an old one, I don't know but what—"

He paused; and he never finished the communication in Gabe's presence.

At the fort everything went along smoothly during the winter. There were no alarms, no trouble, until one night early in the spring.

Then, about an hour after dark, Arkansaw and Gabe Wickett suddenly appeared upon the scene with an Indian prisoner.

"Close the gate. Be lively now; you've got no time to spare. Provision the block-house, and get into it, for in an hour the Indians will be down on you."

How they flew about! What a world of confusion there was!

Meanwhile Arkansaw had taken his prisoner into the ground-floor room of the block-house. Here he tried to induce him to talk, but in vain. The scout had caught him spying just outside of the stockade.

"Don't talk, then," finally said the scout, and flung him, bound hand and foot, in one corner.

Wearily time went by, until at last the midnight hour was reached, and then the long expected and dreaded whoop was heard as the Indians rushed at the stockade gate with a heavy battering-ram.

The gate had been carelessly secured, and gave way at the first blow.

"Back to the block-house!" cried the scout, in a tone of chagrin. "Somebody's carelessness will cost us all our lives."

Back to the block-house they fought their way, and entering, secured the heavy log door.

The Indians wasted no time in useless attempts to break it down, but resorted to their most terrible and important and effective ally—fire.

A well had been sunk inside of the block-house, the stone walls of which were raised flush with the second floor.

"Haul up water!" said Arkansaw, in a hoarse tone. "It's a hopeless case, but we must not give up until the end cannot be longer delayed."

"Fire!" cried some one.

Arkansaw's cheek paled. But he remained cool and steady-nerved, and tried to drown the conflagration by pouring water down through the loop-holes.

But it was of no use.

Steadily and surely the flames began to wrap themselves about the building, growing stronger and fiercer with every breath of air that was stirring.

"We are doomed!" said John Platt, hoarsely.

A howl of anguish rang through the block-house.

The flames had reached the Indian prisoner in the room below, bound hand and foot, unable to do aught to save himself.

Not one among those in the block-house but shuddered at the sound, for it made them picture the fate which awaited themselves.

Higher and higher the flames mounted, the Indians outside dancing and yelling like fiends, the cries of the unfortunate wretch in the room below becoming hushed in death.

Higher and higher still the flames mounted, until the whole block-house was a sheet of fire.

The Indians waited for the pale-faces to come forth, but they waited in vain, waited until all that was left of the block-house was a pile of glowing embers, and then one of their number said:

"Wagh! The pale-faces are great braves, squaws and all. Sooner than become captives, they have all died together in the fire!"

It impressed the Indians with awe, to have witnessed the death of so many persons, not one of whom had uttered a shriek or a moan which they could hear, and with this feeling of awe upon them, they silently went away.

An hour later, one of their number was to be seen returning. It was Lightning. He kicked aside some smoking fragments, and exposed a human skull with a few charred shreds of flesh adhering.

"Where is she who said she was my mother?" he muttered. "Is she burned like a dog?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WELL.

THERE was a sad and moody look on the face of Lightning, as he kicked the human skull from among the smoldering embers of the ruins of the block-house.

Until very recently he had thoroughly believed himself to be an Indian, his whiteness being a mark of the great Manitou's displeasure for some actions of his parents. And he had grown up to man's estate, feeling that it devolved on him to be braver and more of an Indian than the Indians themselves, to wipe out the disgrace—to once more gain for his family the favor of the displeased Manitou.

This belief of his had received a rude shock, when Mrs. Platt declared that she was his mother. He had indignantly denied that he was a pale-face, but her tones echoed familiarly in his ears—faintly, to be sure, yet familiarly, as if they had belonged to long—long ago.

Then Hard-Heart's words to him had been very sarcastic since the last warpath, on which he had failed to take any scalps. The chief had taunted him about his white skin—had said that Lightning possessed the cowardly heart of a pale-face dog, and at last an old Indian squaw had told him point blank that he was a pale-face in reality.

Faith to color is considered a great virtue among Indians, and Lightning wondered if he had any business to raise his hand against his kindred, if kindred the inhabitants of Fort Platt were. His Indian education, his love for Sunlight, decided him on remaining where he was, and when, in the spring, the Indians again went on the warpath, with Fort Platt as their first point of attack, he had gone with them.

Taught to feel an unlimited scorn for the pale-faces—taught that they were cowardly curs, he had been deeply impressed when he saw the block-house burned down, and felt that all its inmates must have perished, and yet had not even uttered a single cry.

"Even the pale-face squaws are great braves!" he muttered. "It would be no disgrace to have such a squaw for a mother as she who claimed me for a son. She had the heart of a lion!"

Lightning had parted with the retreating body of Indians, and returned to the ruins of the block-house, half hoping that by some chance he would find the "great squaw" living.

But all was silent as the grave. Not a living being but himself was anywhere visible.

"It is well," he grunted, as he glanced down at his belt. "They cannot reproach me with not taking scalps, for none of them have done so. And I should not have wanted to take scalps of any of those who were here and are now in the land of spirits with the Manitou of the pale-faces."

Slowly retracing his steps, he paused at the edge of the woods and allowed a melancholy gaze to rest for a minute or two on the still smoldering ruins, and then he disappeared.

An hour—two—three—passed, and still that solemn hush hung over the scene.

Then a timber that hung partially across the opening of the well, which had arisen level with the second story floor, it will be remembered, suddenly lost its equilibrium and fell with a crash.

Then there was silence again for a little while, and then a human head was slowly raised above the top of the well walls.

It was the head of Arkansaw.

Swiftly and keenly his eyes flashed over the scene beyond, hither and thither, being particularly directed toward the woods.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked a hoarse voice.

"They have all gone," replied Arkansaw. "It's as I expected. They struck the blow, and, as is customary, are now getting away from the spot as rapidly as possible."

He now raised his shoulders above the well curb, then his body, and finally entirely emerged.

A heavy timber, whose greenness had prevented its being burned to ashes, laid in an advantageous position for the purpose for which Arkansaw wanted it, and he soon had one end on the ground, the other being on the well.

Then one by one the inmates of the block-house emerged and crossed the timber bridge to the ground. Not one of their lives was missing—the well had saved the lives of all in the fort.

When the block-house was all on fire; when they were already beginning to feel its scorching breath on their cheeks, an inspiration had come to Arkansaw.

"The well!" he had suddenly cried. "Fling the furniture into it."

Promptly they obeyed him, and then, one by one, they descended into the interior. Arkansaw was the last to enter, bringing with him some boards and loose lumber, which he placed above their heads as a protection from the burning brands, which soon must begin to fall, and to prevent them from setting fire to the boards that screened them, they were deluged with water.

The quarters in the well had been rather crowded, cramped and uncomfortable. But what was a little discomfort when life was at stake?

When every man, woman and child of them had emerged from the well and stood safely on the ground, John Platt strode to where Arkansaw was standing, and silently extended his hand.

That was all the thanks Arkansaw received, and it was all he wanted. The pressure of John Platt's honest hand spoke volumes.

They now began to look about them, and to their surprise found that Hard-Heart had left the stockade and the huts of the different families standing, a fact which struck them as being very singular.

"It isn't singular, though," said Arkansaw, when some one asked him if he could explain it. "This Hard-Heart possesses the cunning of a fox, combined with the devilish cruelty and blood-thirstiness of the wolf. I can see his purpose without cudgeling my brains much. What could be more inviting to a party of frontiersmen than these cleared fields and houses, ready to their hands? He thinks us all dead. Well, some one comes along and settles here, and then he swoops down again."

Arkansaw's solution of the matter was a perfectly correct one.

"The pale-faces, toward the rising sun, are thick as the leaves of the trees in yonder forest. We cannot go among them, can't fight them in their strongholds—we must draw them here within our reach. These huts will be a trap for them. The red man's only chance is to be cunning and watchful, to lead the pale-faces into ambushes and corners, where they must perish like dogs, as they perished by fire in yonder strong-house," pointing toward the block-house, then tumbling in ruins.

And the braves, with exclamations of satisfaction and admiration for Hard-Heart's shrewdness and far-sightedness, allowed the huts to stand.

At once they commenced to gather all the horses and stock belonging to the pale-faces, and when this was accomplished they drove them away into the forest.

Four of the oldest braves, whose services were least valuable on the warpath, were selected to drive the stock through the forest to the Indian village, while the remainder, under Hard-Heart's lead, went into camp for the day, intending that afternoon to make a forced march and reach another pale-face settlement after nightfall.

Arkansaw's first care was the broken gate of the stockade.

He told John Platt how it might most speedily be repaired, and then he started for the woods, considering it an absolute neces-

sity to know what movements the Indians had made after leaving the fort's vicinity.

In an hour he returned.

"Gabe," he called, and then took his side-partner beyond the hearing of the others. "You have nothing to fear here. The Indians have struck across country toward Jake Dinkel's clearing, excepting four of 'em, who have started for the Indian village with the stock. These last will probably take things leisurely, and you will have no trouble in coming up with 'em. Take three or four of the boys with you and re-capture the stock—without it our friends here will starve to death."

"And you?"

"I must warn the whites at Dinkel's clearing if I can," and Arkansaw's face was very grave.

A minute later he passed through the gate, the last one to bid adieu to Floy Raynor.

"You will be careful?" she earnestly said.

"Certainly," he said. "Good-bye."

Dropping into a trot whenever the ground was clear enough to permit it, and at all other times going at the best possible gait, disregarding the fact that he was tired—had not had a wink of sleep in nearly forty-eight hours—Arkansaw hurried on to try and save the threatened whites, over whose head an awful doom was impending.

He reached Dinkel's clearing only an hour before the attack might be expected, and already, he had no doubt, the Indian spies were watching the clearing, in the center of which half a dozen huts were grouped for better protection, but without a block-house to retire to, without even a stockade.

As quickly as possible the inhabitants were aroused, and deserting their cattle, and all they had in the world, they silently followed the scout into the depths of the woods. He left them in a place of comparative safety, and then with his lips firmly compressed, with a stern look on his face, he went back toward the clearing.

"These attacks must be stopped!" he had determined.

Half an hour later a heavy explosion echoed and re-echoed through the woods. The scout had struck the Indians a terrible blow!

CHAPTER XIV.

MAD FOR REVENGE.

ARKANSAW met with no interruption in going back to the clearing until he had reached the edge of the forest. He was moving ahead very carefully, for he wished to have a look across the clearing before he ventured into it; and then he was startlingly surprised when he suddenly stepped on the leg of an Indian, stretched flat on his stomach, peering into the clearing.

A guttural exclamation followed in the Indian tongue.

But for his acquaintance with the tongue, Arkansaw would have been placed in a bad box.

As it was, he promptly replied, and so satisfactorily that he was allowed to pass on, the Indian supposing him to be another of the scouts who were out reconnoitering the clearing.

"That's a warning to be even more careful," muttered Arkansaw. "It's a pesky risk I'm running, but if I can work my plan, and include old Hard-Heart among the killed, it will be worth all the risk."

Like some dark shadow, so silently he moved, he left the cover of the forest, and finally crept up to, and then into the largest of the huts, that of Jake Dinkel, a German who had been the original settler at the spot.

In the hut Arkansaw remained about five minutes, and then emerging, he softly made his way to the rear of the building, and stretched himself on the ground beside it, concealing himself by drawing over him a wide plank which lay near by.

This last was a necessary precaution, as a few Indian scouts presently moved silently through the little settlement.

Arkansaw had not very long to wait for the moment of the attack.

He heard the Indians gather in front of Dinkel's hut, and took from his pocket a piece of flint and steel, for striking fire, this being before the days of matches.

Crack!

The redskins had flung themselves against the door of the hut.

It gave way.

In they rushed, then paused, puzzled by the

silence, disappointed in hearing no cries of alarm.

They then began to utter cries of disappointment as a glimmering of the truth that the hut was deserted began to dawn on their minds, and then they began to rush wildly about the hut, tearing and rending things in their wild fury while they hunted for the hut's absent owners.

Arkansaw shuddered.

"I hate to do it," he muttered. "It looks too much like murder. However, it's no more than they would do, and it's time these awful Indian butcheries were stopped. I'd rather fight 'em in a square stand-up style, one by one, but it can't be done."

With a steady hand he struck the steel and flint together, and a spark of fire was produced.

But it failed to perform the work it was intended for. A second spark, however, fell on some powder placed in front of a small chink between the logs.

Hiss! sputter! fizzle!

One moment Arkansaw waited to see that the train he had laid was caught. Then he sprang to his feet and dashed across the cleared ground, and gained the cover of the woods. Here he paused and waited.

His work had been well done, and suddenly there came an explosion. The train of gunpowder had carried the fire to a five pound can of the same material, planted inside of the hut.

The hut's roof was torn off, a bright column of flame shot high up in the night air, now filled with the terrible howls of the wounded and dying. It was a horrible sight, and Arkansaw shuddered, stout of heart as he was and accustomed to scenes of bloodshed and violent deaths.

Nearly all of the Indians must have been in the hut, and of those who had passed its portals it was impossible that more than a few could have escaped.

A minute later the silence of the grave itself rested over the clearing. Though many of the Indians must be suffering severely, not a groan or a cry of anguish was to be heard. Thus for a little while, and Arkansaw could see the living among the redskins crawling like snakes along the ground, seeking the shelter of the forest.

They expected at any minute to be attacked by a body of avenging pale-faces, and were in confusion, and each man of them was looking to his own safety.

This lack of concert in their movements impressed Arkansaw with the belief that the master spirit in all their bloody raids—Hard-Heart—had met his death.

Lying there in concealment Arkansaw could hear the Indians moving about close by on either side of him, but he never moved, for, until daylight broke, he was perfectly safe where he was.

About an hour before daylight the Indians, having recovered from their fears of an attack, entered the clearing in a body, were there near the huts a few minutes, and then disappeared in the direction whence they had come.

Arkansaw did not venture from his concealment until long after daylight. Then he entered the clearing and went to the hut, which had been shattered by the explosion.

He counted fourteen dead Indians. All those who had been wounded, but had remained able to walk with assistance, had been taken away. Those who would have died anyhow were a little hurried in their exit from this world by the knives of their comrades.

Among the bodies Arkansaw looked sharply for two in particular, those of Hard-Heart and Lightning. Not finding that of the latter, he breathed a deep sigh of relief; and not finding the chief among the slain, his fist clenched with disappointment; for if Hard-Heart still lived, half the purpose of the explosion had failed.

Hard-Heart had been in the hut at the moment of the explosion, but had escaped with his life.

Lightning had just entered another hut hard by when the explosion occurred, and consequently failed to be in any way affected or injured by it.

Sullen-faced, but with flashing eyes, with hearts madly thirsting for revenge, the survivors of Hard-Heart's band retreated in the wake of their disfigured chief, who suffered such anguish from his wounds and burns that he was nearly beside himself.

In a densely thicketed ravine, through which a stream of water ran, they came to a sudden halt.

"Revenge must be our watchword!" he hoarsely said, as the Indians gathered about him. "Let half a dozen of our young men volunteer to go near the enemy and find out how we may strike back, may return with interest the terrible blow which they have let fall on us."

Among those who signified their readiness to act as scouts was Lightning.

"I am glad to see Lightning is ready to face danger," said Hard-Heart, fastening his remaining eye on the young fellow. "I had begun to believe that he was faint-hearted. Let him but bring back a scalp as an evidence that he has been near the pale-face dogs, and I will cause his praises to be sung in every wigwam in our village."

Like snakes the scouts glided away into the woods, just as daylight began to break in the eastern sky.

CHAPTER XV.

ARKANSAW A CAPTIVE.

ARKANSAW having concluded his search among the dead bodies, bethought him of the fugitives in their hiding place, and knew that they in all probability were anxiously awaiting his return. There was nothing more to be done here now, and he left the clearing, passing within a dozen feet of where one of the scouts sent out by Hard-Heart was lying concealed.

The brave was a young man, but tall, well-formed, lithe and supple, and from his quickness of movement had been called the Arrow.

The brave was young and ambitious, and his eyes gleamed with ill-concealed delight when he recognized the person of the dreaded Trackless. He had heard the marvelous stories that were told of the Trackless, that he was more than mortal, and could not be killed. But he saw the man before him, and he was certainly flesh and blood.

The Arrow was not the possessor of a rifle, but he was an expert in the use of the tomahawk, and as he noiselessly arose to his feet he grasped firmly the handle of this dreaded weapon.

Fairer target was never presented than was the scout, slowly and steadily walking, his back toward the Indian.

The Arrow braced his feet, measured the distance with his eye with an accuracy that was wonderful, then raised the weapon, and with a powerful jerk sent it flying at Arkansaw's head.

But for its course being slightly changed by striking a twig that lay in its line of flight, it must have cleft the scout's skull. As it was, so near to the mark did it come, that the sharp blade sliced Arkansaw's right ear off close to his head.

The Arrow, in his exultation, believing the tomahawk must cleave the scout's head in twain, had not sunk down in his cover again.

It was a fatal mistake on his part.

Quick as lightning in his comprehension, Arkansaw was facing the Arrow, his rifle at his shoulder, in less time than it takes to count three.

The Arrow saw his danger when it was too late.

He attempted to disconcert Arkansaw's aim.

Crack!

His heart pulsed for the last time as the rifle spoke.

Arkansaw stooped and picked up the lost ear, put it coolly into his pocket and walked away.

There was no need of the scout's returning to look at the body of the Indian. He could have sworn to the fatal result of that shot. So, pocketing the ear, he resumed his way toward where he had left the Dinkel party, loading his rifle as he went.

"Hard-Heart has not made tracks out of the country as I thought he would," reflected the scout. "He has halted somewhere within a dozen miles, and this fellow was a scout sent back. There are probably others of 'em lurkin' about, and it's my best medicine to look sharp and be careful."

It was well that he did so.

When within a quarter of a mile of the hiding-place of the Dinkel party, he was informed by the snapping of a dry twig that some human being was in the vicinity.

At once he sought the cover of the trunk of

a tree, and for several minutes stood there as motionless as the tree itself.

Then his keen scrutiny was rewarded by the sight of a human head—not that of an Indian, however, but that of Jake Dinkel.

Arkansaw was on the point of calling to him when it struck him that Dinkel was watching something or somebody, which his own position precluded him from seeing. This reflection having occurred to him, the scout silently changed his position, seeking shelter behind a tree diagonally opposite to the one he had just deserted.

His new position enabled him to prove the truth of his conjecture.

Dinkel was watching somebody, and that somebody an Indian, towards whom he was gradually stealing, waiting an opportunity for a safe and sure shot.

The Indian was aware that he was in the immediate neighborhood of the hiding-place of the pale-faces, and was moving with extreme caution, his attention being so completely taken up with what was in front of him that he failed to detect the presence of an enemy in his rear, even though with an Indian's usual caution he did not neglect to cast an occasional glance behind him, on each of which occasion Dinkel was fortunately under cover.

At last Arkansaw managed to obtain a good view of the Indian's face, and he started, when in him he recognized Lightning, the son of Mrs. Platt.

And Lightning it was. Instead of going back to the clearing as Arrow had done, he had started to encircle it at some distance, hoping to find the trail left by the retreating inhabitants of the empty huts. In this he had been successful, and was now drawing near to their cover; in fact, he was at last within a hundred feet of the very spot.

Here Lightning laid himself down between the trunks of two trees, lying parallel and only two feet apart, and then, elevating his head above that nearest the camp, he listened intently.

Jake Dinkel saw his opportunity.

Swiftly, but silently approaching, he had placed the muzzle within half a dozen feet of Lightning's head, and was in the act of pulling the trigger, when a hand was laid on his arm and arrested him.

At that moment Lightning suddenly turned and faced them, and seeing his danger, he made a movement toward his tomahawk.

"Do not move hand or foot, or you are a dead man!" Arkansaw sternly said, in the Indian tongue.

"The Trackless!"

Lightning grunted these words, and then remained silent and motionless, aware that his life was again in this man's hands, and calmly and sullenly awaiting his disposition of it.

"The Trackless has only pity for the Lightning," said Arkansaw, gravely, still speaking the Indian tongue, which was better comprehended by the other. "The Trackless' hand is never at fault when a redskin comes to fight with him, or to match skill with him. But the Trackless cannot kill a pale-face, and Lightning is a pale-face, the son of a pale-face father and mother. Will the Lightning give me his word not to raise his hand against these pale-faces?"

"Is it the price of my life?" demanded Lightning, sullenly.

"No," was the astute reply. "It is a pledge one brave man asks of another."

"And you will take my word?" with a gleam of pleasure in his eyes.

"A truly brave man never speaks with a crooked tongue," was the reply.

Arkansaw's sparing his life on a former occasion, his feats of bravery, and this lack of fear now of the result of allowing him to go free, awoke in Lightning's untutored mind a deep admiration for the scout.

"Wagh!" he grunted. "I have been taught to believe the pale-faces lying dogs, cowardly curs. But they are braves, and it is no disgrace to be a pale-face. But Lightning Indian—all Indian—no pale-face blood—no pale-face heart—though skin pale-face."

"And your word?"

"Lightning will spare these pale-faces for the sake of the brave Trackless, for the sake of the pale-face squaw whose words were soft but who wrongly thinks Lightning her son. I have spoken."

"Then go," said Arkansaw.

But Lightning paused. In his eyes an inquiry gleamed which his Indian stoicism

made him too proud to frame in words, for he considered inquisitiveness the attribute of a squaw.

"My brother would ask a question?" suggestively said Arkansaw. "Let him, speak."

"You in strong house?" in broken English.

"I was."

"You no hurt?"

"You see me as I am."

"Why this so? Fireman all Injin."

"Pale-face wiser brave than redskin. Where Injin get gun? Pale-face. Where Injin get powder? Pale-face. Where—"

"Where Injin get rum? Pale-face!" interrupted Lightning, as he stalked away.

"Why didn't you make a prisoner of him if you didn't want to kill him?" inquired Jake Dinkel, after Lightning had disappeared.

"Because to have made him a prisoner would only make him more bitter. As it is, I have his pledge not to help do us any harm."

"You said he was a pale-face!"

"Yes, he is the son of John Platt."

"The one stolen by the Indians many years ago?" with deep interest in his tone.

"The same," was the reply of Arkansaw, and then they entered the camp.

Here everything was found as they had left it, or rather as Arkansaw had left it when he returned to the clearing to blow up the Indians in the hut.

After having broken his fast, and having had the blood washed from his face and neck, Arkansaw drew a little apart from the others and sat down to think.

On very few occasions in his eventful life had he felt so great a responsibility resting on his shoulders as now. The Indians were still strong enough in numbers to be more than a match for Dinkel's party, unless they occupied some very strong natural position.

Presently the scout remembered just such a spot, and thither he led the fugitives.

His next care must be to ascertain exactly how strong the Indians were, and how they were located. It might be possible, he told himself, to turn the tables and become the attacking party.

Including himself, Dinkel's party numbered six strong, brave, resolute men, all good shots. Were the Indians encamped in a place favorable to the enterprise, he might lead an attack on them.

At any rate, the fugitives were now encamped in a spot where the Indians would hardly dare attack them, and so Arkansaw bade them adieu for a brief while, for the purpose of reconnoitering the Indians, and learning exactly what they were up to.

Hard-Heart's party had taken a course due south when they left the clearing, and by describing a segment of a circle, of which the clearing was the center, Arkansaw knew he would come across the trail they left behind.

This was the simplest part of the expedition he was on, the trail being found without difficulty.

But now he was called upon to exercise all of his skill, and cunning, and knowledge of woodcraft.

That scouts were out he knew, and the danger of encountering one of these was the greatest risk he ran.

He managed, however, to draw near to the Indian camping spot without having, so far as he could judge, been discovered. And yet discovered he had been, and was being followed by an Indian scout, possibly, as Lightning had been followed by Jake Dinkel, and like Lightning, he failed to become aware of the fact.

At first, the Indian only knew that he was spying upon a pale-face, and when he recognized him as the Trackless, he trembled like one stricken with the palsy. The Trackless had been in the burning fort, had never issued from it, and yet here he was, alive and well!

The Indian, naturally superstitious, was more than staggered.

As they drew nearer the Indian camp, after they had entered the ravine, the redskin's courage began to revive. Arkansaw's peculiar tactics in approaching the camp were something that the Indian could understand, something tangible, and going to prove that the Trackless was human as well as himself.

Lying flat on his stomach Arkansaw went like a snake through the thicket for the last hundred feet of his approach, and then by parting the bushes very slightly he could see the body of Indians, some lounging about, some moodily sitting around, while others

nursed their wounds, the result of the explosion.

No one who has never witnessed the sight can imagine how silently, how stealthily an Indian can approach a person.

With breath suspended, or drawn with no noise whatever and only at long intervals, with feet raised carefully for each succeeded step and not allowed to touch the earth until the spot has been inspected, with eyes glowing, with every muscle kept tense and ready like coiled springs, to unwind at a breath—that is something of the style of an Indian's approaching his unsuspecting victim.

The Indian's tomahawk was raised, prepared to strike the moment Arkansaw took the alarm; but fate was for once against the scout, and the Indian drew closer and closer, his eyes gleaming more brightly as he began to dream of capturing the Trackless alive instead of killing him.

Nearer—nearer—and then the Indian crouched. The steel-like muscles suddenly relaxed, the Indian bounded forward and upward, and came heavily down on Arkansaw's back, driving the wind from his body and placing him *hors du combat*.

Arkansaw tried to turn to make a struggle, but the Indian had him at too great a disadvantage, facing the earth flat on his stomach, and the shrill yell of the Indian had already brought him assistance.

The jig was up.

Arkansaw—or the dreaded Trackless, as the Indians called him—was at last a prisoner.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN CAPTIVITY.

At last Arkansaw was a prisoner—was in the power of the Indians, who had so much reason to fear and hate him.

Lying flat on his stomach, he had been unable to strike a blow in self-defense when the Indian sprang upon his back.

In less than a minute he was dragged to his feet and disarmed, and was then marched from the lusher toward the camp-fire, where Hard-Heart stood calmly waiting for the prisoner to be brought to him.

When but a few feet separated Hard-Heart and the captive Trackless, the Indians released their hold of the latter, but stood around him in a circle, their weapons in their hands to cut him down in case he made any attempt to escape.

Hard-Heart knew that the prisoner was a white man, but it was not until he looked up a minute after this—during which interval there had been profound silence—that he knew that it was the Trackless who had been captured.

From infancy an Indian is taught to conceal his feelings and emotions, so that when grown up, they usually have the most perfect control over their minds and bodies.

In spite of his long schooling, Hard-Heart could not repress a start of surprise when he recognized the Trackless, and then a gleam of savage pleasure glowed in his remaining eye.

Then he controlled himself and scrutinized Arkansaw from head to foot in a most leisurely manner.

"My brother has lost an ear," he then said, having observed Arkansaw's loss of one of those members.

"He has."

"Some one of my braves doubtless bears it as a trophy," said the wily chief.

"The Indian dog hung his tomahawk from behind a tree. He bore the totem of an arrow, and the wolves will pick his bones, for he is gone to the happy hunting grounds."

[Totem—some distinguishing mark. Indians frequently had their private totem, although whole tribes sometimes bore the same mark. It is said that one of the famous Six Nations bore the totem of a turtle, pricked in indelible ink, as sailors have pictures or names pricked on their arms.]

Hard-Heart knew, from Arkansaw's description, that it was one of his scouts—a young brave, and one of the best—and his eyes lighted with anger.

"Bind the Trackless!" he ordered, and then strode away.

Arkansaw was firmly bound hand and foot, and, for greater safety, was then secured to a tree.

Then two Indians mounted guard over him while the others were called aside by Hard-Heart, and all went into council.

From the spot where he was fastened, Ar-

kansaw could see all that transpired in the council, and he knew that its purpose was the deciding of what was to be done with him. And yet one would hardly have thought, to judge from the scout's calm face, that he was conscious that the group of Indians were then discussing how he should be put to death.

There was no question as to whether he should live or die. That was settled without a word being said. The only question was how he should die, and when.

Arkansaw's greatest regret at that moment was that he had been captured without his being able to strike a single blow. Still, he was more than consoled when he thought how he had blown them up in the hut, and thought of Hard-Heart's disfigured face and loss of an eye.

While the council was in progress, a young Indian stalked into the camp, passing near where Arkansaw was held captive.

It was Lightning.

As his eyes lighted on Arkansaw, his face was covered with an expression of consternation and surprise, and he halted short. His eyes and those of the scout chanced to meet, and the latter bent a peculiar look on the Indian.

Then Lightning stalked on and joined the council.

A few minutes later, the other scouts returned, and also joined in the pow-wow over the fate of their prisoner.

There were no wild shouts, no extravagant manifestations of joy over the capture of Trackless; but it was easy to see that there was a general intense, deep satisfaction that he was in their power.

After all the scouts had returned, the discussion of the Trackless was deferred to receive their reports.

All but Lightning were in favor of attacking the party of whites. Their position was a strong one, but they were few in number, and taken by surprise, could be easily overcome.

Lightning differed from this view.

Though few in number, he said the party was well armed; even the women had firearms, and knew how to use them. It was his advice that Dinkel's party be let alone, and that they should swoop across country and down on some one unprepared for their coming.

"Has Lightning brought back a scalp as evidence that he was near this party?" asked Hard-Heart, in a sarcastic tone.

"He has not," was the reply, and Lightning sat down amid the sneers and jeering looks of the braves, all of whom knew that he was in reality a pale-face, and secretly disliked him.

The reports of the other scouts were accepted as of more worth than Lightning's, and it was decided to attack the Dinkel party during the night.

Then Trackless became again the subject of discussion.

Feeling that he had been rebuked, Lightning made no attempt to speak or express any views as to what should be done with the dreaded and famous man.

It was finally decided that he should not be killed until after their return to their village.

They would attack the concealed whites that night and in the morning would start to return to their village.

Arkansaw was shrewd enough to guess at the conclusion of the council from the manner in which it broke up. An occasional brave sauntered near him to gaze at him in curious wonder, or to give him a kick, but otherwise no attention was paid to him, save by an occasional glance in his direction.

Once, from a distance, he caught Lightning's gaze fastened on him, and Arkansaw felt sure there was encouragement in the Indian's eyes!

For years Lightning had been an especial pet of Hard-Heart, who had found pleasure in so tutoring a pale-face as to make him hate his kindred with all the intensity of an Indian. Force of circumstances had disappointed Hard-Heart's expectations of the white blood which Lightning would shed.

The disappointed chief had now withdrawn his protecting favor from Lightning, and the latter was treated with marked but silent contempt by the braves, a fact which he could not help perceiving, and which angered him greatly.

"He has the heart of a pale-face cur," he had overheard one brave say to another as

he passed; but, though his eyes flashed, he could not invite the speaker to combat, for he could not prove that he was meant, although he was morally sure of it.

A most singular struggle was taking place in the mind of Lightning. Was he a pale-face? Arkansaw had said so, had twice spared his life on that account, when, had he been a redskin, he knew that he would have been killed.

The proof now seemed stronger than ever. Besides, he had been deeply injured in feeling, grossly insulted, and was rendered sullen.

At that moment, except for the Sunlight in the Indian village, he would have deserted the tribe. A lesson which had been strongly impressed on his mind was to be true to his kindred and kind.

This lesson was now reacting on itself in a manner which Hard-Heart had never deemed possible.

When the hour came for the attack on the whites, Lightning joined the attacking party, his jaws firmly set, an unalterable resolution giving a strangely set look to his face.

The scouts who had discovered the hiding-place of Dinkel's party led the way. The Indians had approached undiscovered and were very near the place, in another minute would have dashed out upon the pale-faces, when suddenly a rifle report rang out, startling both the whites and the Indians.

The shot was intended as a warning, and had been fired by Lightning.

"Traitor!" hissed a voice in Lightning's ear, and a tomahawk was swiftly raised to strike him down. Lightning had been suspected, and Hard-Heart had deputed a brave to be ever near him.

Lightning dodged the descending tomahawk, and closed in on his antagonist just as the main body of the Indians, urged on by Hard-Heart, with a yell broke cover and bounded upon the pale-faces, standing ready to meet them, and who poured a deadly volley into the band of red devils.

Meanwhile, Lightning and his antagonist were battling fiercely.

Fortune favored the former. The Indian fell, pierced to the heart by Lightning's knife.

One minute the young man gloomily paused, heard the maddening yells of the repulsed Indians, heard their crashing through the bushes, and then strode away at a rapid pace.

CHAPTER XVII.

A RUTHLESS FATHER.

HAD it not been for the timely warning which Dinkel received by the discharge of Lightning's gun, he and his party would most assuredly have been wiped out of existence by the Indians.

Dinkel and his companions were brave men—among the bravest of the brave, but they were not conversant with all the wiles and ways of the redmen. Had Arkansaw been there, and doing picket duty, he would have known of the approach of the Indians, but sounds that to his ear would have been full of meaning, fell on their ears without any significance.

But, once warned by the rifle shot, Dinkel had given a few rapid and brief orders, and shoulder to shoulder, the whites waited until the Indians showed themselves, and had poured into them a deadly and telling volley.

The Indians did not pause at first, not knowing how great a loss they had sustained.

Solid and immovable as so many statues carved in stone, the pale-faces stood, until the Indians closed in on them.

Then the few pistols among them began to crack, and their knives began to swiftly flash about.

Dinkel clubbed his gun, and flung himself right into the midst of the Indians, and heroic was the work done by him.

From the instant when Lightning's gun spoke, to that when the last Indian dove into the cover of the bushes, was not more than three minutes. But, short as had been the fight, it had been most bloody.

Of the Indians, no less than seven were dead, and one of the whites would never speak again, would never till the soil for the support of his family, would never again dandle his little child on his knee.

Foaming with rage, Hard-Heart drew off his braves, and counted them to see what losses they had sustained. Nine were miss-

ing, including Lightning and the brave who had been deputed to remain beside him.

The chief was for making another attack on the whites, but the braves shook their heads. So disastrous had been the expedition, that they were discouraged and disheartened.

Hard-Heart was overruled, and, giving in with a very bad grace, he led the way back to the camp. Accidentally he stumbled across the Indian killed by Lightning. Hard-Heart bent down and felt of the Indian's hand, and from the fact that a finger was missing, knew who it was.

His brows contracted, his face darkened. This brave had not been killed by the whites—he had been slain by Lightning, who, as was now clear to Hard-Heart, had fired that shot.

Lightning's mind was in a tumult after killing his antagonist.

He had saved the whites at the expense of the Indians, whom he had been taught to regard as brothers.

That Hard-Heart would learn that he was the cause of the defeat Lightning knew, and knew further that now the hand of every brave in Hard-Heart's band would be raised against him. He was now what every true Indian detests—a tribeless brave—and he was sad at heart, for, as yet, he was too much of an Indian at heart to dream of going to live among the pale-faces.

His step was very slow, his face very grave, as he, unconsciously to himself, went in the direction of the camp, where the Trackless remained under the guard of two Indians.

Finally a thought of the Trackless flashed across his mind.

He owed him a deep debt of gratitude, and, Indian-like, must repay it if he could.

He hastened his steps, but reached the spot when Arkansaw was too late to rescue him, for the returning party was already hard at hand.

Taking their prisoner with them, pausing not to rest, they at once started for the Indian village.

Arkansaw knew where they had gone, and from the manner of their return knew that they had been repulsed, and his eyes opened with astonishment and pleasure when, on counting them, he found that nine of their number were missing.

When daylight came, he for the first time learned that one of the nine was Lightning.

"Poor fellow!" he muttered, in a sad tone. "For his mother's sake I am sorry for his death. And killed by a white man's bullet, at that!"

Arkansaw did not then, though he afterwards reflected, that Lightning's death made his own an absolute certainty.

In view of the losses the Indians had sustained in this last encounter, Arkansaw knew that he would probably be put to the torture the minute the village was reached.

To say that he relished his position would be untrue. In fact, he thought of Floy Raynor, who had latterly shown so much interest in him, and his heart was saddened. Still he bore himself like a brave man, and one not afraid of death.

Half way to the village Hard-Heart brought the party to a halt.

He had expected ere this to have come up with the braves sent on ahead with the stolen stock from Fort Platt, or at least to have crossed their trail, but as yet neither had been done.

After a brief consultation with several of the most trusted braves, three Indians were sent back in the direction of Fort Platt to join the quartette with the stock, and hurry them on toward the village.

This being settled, Hard-Heart pushed on again, keeping up the rapid pace which they had adopted at the commencement of the retreat.

Lightning, in the meantime, his brain filled with a new project, had pressed on ahead of them, and a dozen hours before the party could expect to reach the village, Lightning was concealed in the bushes near the spring where Sunlight frequently came.

He had longer to wait on this occasion than he expected.

Sunlight did not visit the spring until later in the afternoon, and Lightning dared not enter the village. Had he done so he would instantly have been surrounded by a crowd of eager questioners, who would have thought his presence a strange event, and would probably have made him a captive until the chief's return.

A rustling in the bushes caused the beautiful Indian girl to quickly face that direction, and a glad little cry escaped her when she recognized Lightning.

It was only a few seconds, however, before she approached him more soberly, as is supposed to be becoming in the approach of an Indian woman to her lord and master.

"Why is Lightning here alone? Where are the others?" she asked, after he had caught her in his arms.

"They are coming," he answered, evasively. "Let the Sunlight come with me where we will not be seen by prying eyes."

She gravely followed him into a dense growth of bushes, and then stood before him with downcast eyes, waiting for him to speak.

"Will the Sunlight leave her father's wigwam for that of Lightning?"

"Is Lightning's wigwam ready?"

He bit his lip at this reply.

"Sunlight loves the Lightning?" he asked.

"Does the Manitou love his children?" she answered. "As he loves, so I love."

"And will you leave your tribe and fly with me?"

She looked up, distressed and surprised.

"What has happened? Why speaks the Lightning in this strange way—as the sun-light's darkened when clouds are in the sky?"

"I can no longer stay among your people. Will you leave them to go with me?"

"You are disgraced?" recoiling from him in a species of horror. "You have been proved of the white heart?" (of being a coward.)

Lightning drew himself proudly up.

"In all the tribe there is none braver than Lightning. Does not your heart tell you so? No, I am not of the white heart. In the hour of battle I met the foe like a brave, and the foe lies dead. But he is of your people."

"Then you will be an outcast—you will be tribeless," sadly; for, as we have said, to be tribeless is to be an object of scorn among all good Indians.

"I will," he slowly returned, and then with folded arms waited for her answer.

The Sunlight looked up into her lover's face. That he loved her deeply she was aware, and she loved him with more than the ordinary devotion of an Indian girl's love.

The inbreeding of many generations had not been eradicated from the nature of this white Indian, and he had always shown in his manner the consideration for women shown by his race, instead of the marked contempt in which Indians hold females.

This consideration had been the means of giving depth and breadth to the love of Sunlight, until now it was strong enough to cause her to overlook the traditions of her people, and placing her hand in that of Lightning, she calmly said:

"Already the Lightning is master of my love, he shall also be master of my life."

"Then come," he said, and led her away, holding her by the hand.

Fate—cruel fate—was against the young lovers.

With hearts thrilling with love, engrossed in themselves, they did not know of his nearness until they encountered Hard-Heart stalking toward the village, some little distance in advance of the rest of the party.

His eyes flashed with deadly anger as they lighted on the lovers.

"Where goes Sunlight with the Lightning?" he gruffly demanded.

"To his lodge," replied the trembling Indian girl, clinging to her lover.

"And where is his lodge?"

"When he finds a fitting place there he will cast it, and Sunlight will then enter."

Hard-Heart's hand clutched the handle of his tomahawk. In another instant the weapon was drawn, and then was sent flying toward the head of his daughter.

Lightning tried to save her, but too late! The sharp blade cleft her skull, and she fell to the earth dead, the blood gushing forth in a crimson stream.

"Die, traitor to your race!" hissed Hard-Heart, as he saw her fall. "You are no longer child of mine—you, who have brought disgrace to the door of a chief's wigwam by running away like a sneaking fox with a dog of a pale-face."

Stunned for one minute by the sight of the death of the Indian maid, whom he had so dearly loved, Lightning stood transfixed. Then he made a movement toward drawing

his tomahawk, and avenging her death by killing Hard-Heart.

The chief had already raised his rifle.

Crack!

Lightning dropped, the bullet whistled over his head. Then he sprang up, was about to dash in on Hard-Heart, paused as the other Indians rushed up, then sprang away.

"I go now, but I will return to avenge her death!" he shouted, and then disappeared with a defiant cry flung at his pursuers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PREPARED FOR THE TORTURE.

GABE WICKETT, it will be remembered, had been instructed by the scout to take some men and go in pursuit of the party having in charge the stolen stock from Fort Platt.

In pursuance of these instructions he and four companions had started in pursuit of this body of the Indians.

No attempt was made to cover the trail; in fact, any attempt would have been useless where the stock was concerned.

Having such a broad and easily followed trail, Gabe and his companions had no difficulty in following it, and were not caused the loss of any time by any blinding of the trail.

The four braves in charge of the stock saw no reason for hurrying, and unless there is need for hurry an Indian is the laziest of all the human family. So they went along in a most leisurely manner, not even thinking it necessary to keep any lookout for danger.

They, of course, supposed that all the inmates of the fort had perished, so, in consequence, there could be no pursuit.

Hard-Heart was then, they thought, in the flush of another victory over the whites at Dinkel's clearing.

Never a solitary thought of the truth of what had transpired since leaving the fort ever crossed their minds.

Gabe and his companions consequently drew close upon them without their having a single suspicion aroused that an enemy was near.

"We must be pretty near 'em now," said Gabe, having paused and bent down to examine the trail more closely. "These tracks are very fresh, and can't certainly be more than an hour or two old."

"I'm glad of that," was the rejoinder of one of his companions, who had been uneasy concerning the safety of the inmates of the fort ever since starting. "I'm glad of that, for there's no telling but what Hard-Heart may have taken it into his head to pay the fort another visit. Are yer goin' to ram right ahead, Gabe?"

"I suppose it's best to plan out what we're a-goin' for to do," was the reply. "As to rammin' ahead—that depends on circumstances entirely. If we can get close enough to get a shot at 'em, why, we'll ram ahead, daylight or no daylight. But more'n likely we'll have to work their own game on 'em, and give 'em the first dose when they get into camp."

In fact, the latter proved to be the case.

The formation of the ground was such that they could not have got near enough for a shot while daylight lasted without being discovered.

Just before nightfall the Indians tethered the horses, and one of their number kept a watch over the cattle to see that they did not stray off into the woods.

In the dusk of the gathering night Gabe and his companions crept up toward the camp, and finally reached a position where at any moment they could obtain a shot.

Gabe waited for a good opportunity, as he wanted to make sure of killing all four. He did not want any of them to escape.

"Hist!"

Thus he called the attention of the others some time after having gained this splendid cover.

The Indians who had been guarding the cattle were approaching the camp-fire, which brought the forms of all into a distinctness greater than even daylight could have done.

"Now!" said Gabe, in a low tone, and then gave each man instructions to shoot at a particular Indian, himself reserving his shot in case any of the others failed.

"Ready?"

"Yes."

"Steady! One—two—three—fire!"

Crack!

Four rifles spoke as one, so nearly were the reports blended.

Gabe had no need to fire.

Able to take such cool and careful aim, each shot had done its work, and the four Indians were dead.

"Now, we'll go into camp," said Gabe, "and eat the supper they were cooking."

In the morning they started back for the fort, arriving there in safety.

The scouts sent back by Hard-Heart in quest of those in charge of the stolen stock, finally stumbled across the ashes and charred fragments of wood where the camp-fire had been built, and soon after found the dead bodies of the four Indians, or at least what was left of the bodies, for a stray wolf or two had already visited the spot.

They followed the return trail long enough to satisfy themselves that it led in the direction of Fort Platt, and that those who drove back the stock were white men.

Puzzled, but more angered even than puzzled, they turned in the direction of their village, their eyes flashing when they thought of the Trackless who must suffer fearfully in payment of all their losses and disappointments.

Arkansaw was indeed in a bad box.

It was not that he would merely be put to death. That was not half so dreadful to think of as the tortures he would first be made to endure.

Hour after hour something seemed to occur to inflame the passions of the Indians still more.

First, there was the explosion. Then the repulse by the ambushed whites. Then the discovery of Sunlight, disgracing her father, according to Indian etiquette, by going away with a tribeless brave. Then her death—a just one in Indian estimation, attributed to a hated pale-face, for such they knew Lightning to be. Then his threat of revenge, and his escape, for his pursuers had returned with the news that he could not be captured.

And now these scouts were returning with the news that four more braves were slain, and the stock was taken from them.

But they never reached the village with the news.

A sworn avenger was on their track, and that avenger was Lightning. He now hated all Indians, and Hard-Heart's band in particular, as he had once hated the pale-faces.

The blood of his slain Sunlight called aloud for vengeance, and the crack of his rifle was death first to one and then another, the last one being killed so near to the village that the report of the shot was heard.

A dozen braves went to the spot and there found the dead body.

At once they scoured the woods in search of the slayer, whom they guessed to be Lightning, but so artfully did he cover his tracks that they could discover no trace of him.

They waited an hour, two of them, three of them, and then they began slowly to be convinced that none of the number would ever return.

Hard-Heart was sullen-faced and angry. The others strode moodily about, their eyes burning, muttering to themselves in guttural tones as they glanced toward the hut in which the Trackless was confined.

There were no loud-voiced lamentations, no angry shouts, no visible excitement; but under that brooding silence there flowed a seething and hot tide of passion, which soon would burst its bounds.

Even the women, usually on such an occasion as great chattering as magpies, were silent.

Those squaws who lose husbands are generally granted the right of raising an infernal din, and generally exercise that right. But now they, too, were silent, and spoke to each other apart, in low tones, with brows contracted and fingers convulsively working.

Heaven help Arkansaw!

Hard-Heart understood what was passing in the minds of all about him, and when at last he was sure that the scouts were all dead, or else would have returned before this, he glanced up toward the sky, and toward the sun which soon would set, then said:

"Is it the wish of the people that the Trackless shall go to the torture to-day?"

"It is!" and with the universal reply came a wild and maddened cry, as if each and every one were a rabid dog.

"Then bring forth the prisoner."

CHAPTER XIX.

SCOURGED.

WHEN the Indians entered the hut in which Arkansaw was confined, he instinctively knew the purpose for which they had come, knew that the hour of great trial had come.

In an Indian's eyes the greatest proof of courage is indicated by the ability to bear pain without murmuring. Of the greater courage—that which is called moral courage—they had no knowledge whatever.

As we have said of Arkansaw before, he was so thoroughly a frontiersman, that he was perfectly acquainted with the character and thoughts, and feelings of the Indians. He knew that to exhibit cowardice would only be to draw down on him their greater contempt and a greater number of the petty indignities which are sometimes harder to bear than greater ones. So, when he was marched out, his head was carried high, and his eyes were made to express anything but fear.

Hard-Heart, for his own part, had not wished that the Trackless should yet be put to torture. He hated the man with such a depth that he wished to keep him prisoner, while he bent his mind to the devising of some more cruel and painful torture than had ever yet been practiced on human beings.

This fact will account to some extent for what followed.

While not daring to go flat-footed counter to the tribe, he, nevertheless, succeeded in directing matters in such a manner that Arkansaw was not sent to kingdom come.

"Wagh!" grunted Hard-Heart, when Arkansaw was brought before him. "It is well."

For fully two minutes the scout and the Indian chief stood there facing each other and eyeing each other keenly.

Hard-Heart's single eye was blazing with a smothered passion. Arkansaw scanned the Indian's face, and a grim smile stole over his own, as he recognized the work of the explosion at the Dinkel hut.

His smile did not tend to soothe the angry passions of Hard-Heart, and for one second it seemed as if the chief would end the whole matter by drawing his tomahawk and braining the captive.

But he remembered himself suddenly, and at once put his angry passions under control.

"Let the squaws who have lost their hunters draw near," ordered Hard-Heart. "And let them come with scourges in their hands. And let the papposes and children come with them."

Instantly there was a commotion among the squaws and the young Indians of both sexes, who at once darted around in quest of whips.

By the time they were ready, Arkansaw had been stripped to the waist and bound to a tree.

Vindictive and revengeful as so many she-wolves, did the squaws gather in front of the scout, glaring on him, restraining themselves with an effort from flying at him, while every muscle was in a state of tension, as they waited for Hard-Heart's word of attack.

The chief glanced around.

He motioned an Indian to approach.

"I can trust you," he said. "Remain near the Trackless—do not let him be killed. Some of the women may have knives."

The Indian took his station.

Hard-Heart grunted the word for which the squaws were impatiently waiting.

Instantly the malevolent she-devils and the children darted forward and began to ply their switches unmercifully. The twigs cut his flesh more than once, drawing the blood and smarting fearfully.

Arkansaw's lips would have been drawn with pain, had he not by an effort wreathed them with a grim smile.

"Lay on—lay on," he muttered, "Some of you have cause enough to hate me, Heaven knows."

They evidently thought they had, judging from the energy they infused into their work.

And while whipping him, the she-devils fought madly among themselves. All of them could not ply the whip on him at once, and those in the rear struggled madly to get to the front, trying to pull back and shove aside those who were in the way, who in turn resisted.

It was pandemonium let loose.

One old squaw, with a wrinkled and weath-

er-beaten visage, had been elbowed out of the way at the moment of the first dash at the scout.

Now she was squealing, and howling, and struggling, and biting, and kicking, and scratching, as she tried to get in the front ranks, near the scout. Her eyes were snapping viciously, like those of a wild animal.

At last she reached the position she had been struggling to obtain, and the snarl which she uttered caused Arkansaw to turn his attention on her.

Arkansaw knew that there was not one chance in a million of his escaping death. In fact, he had taken the wiser course under the circumstances, and entertained no thought except of meeting his fate bravely.

So now his eyes lighted with a satisfied look as they rested on the old squaw, just in the act of drawing a knife, which, up to this moment, she had kept concealed.

Arkansaw hoped the Indian who was guarding against such things as this would not observe the old squaw; better death from a knife thrust at her hands than to be saved to suffer untold agony, and finally be burned at the stake!

To more thoroughly anger her, the scout distorted his face, and spat contemptuously at her.

Hissing something, she sprang at him, whirled the knife above her head, and made a quick pass toward his heart.

But she had been observed.

The Indian placed on guard by Hard-Heart jumped to her side in the nick of time, and arrested her falling arm. Then striking her a savage blow in the face, he ordered her to leave the whipping party, to go to her wigwam.

Crestfallen at her non-success, the old hag withdrew, not daring to do aught but obey.

Full well the Indian knew that Arkansaw had invited this attack from the old she-devil, and he made some sarcastic remark to the effect that the scout was not going to get off as easy as that.

"Do your worst," said Arkansaw, coolly. "Even then you will not be square with me," shrugging his smarting shoulders.

The Indian made no reply, only smiled grimly, and watched more sharply, in case of such another attempt by some squaw who was unable to control her temper. But though the whipping was continued far beyond the usual time for such things, and the squaws at length worked themselves into a perfect frenzy, no serious attempt was made on the scout's life.

"Wonder how long they're going to keep this up?" muttered Arkansaw. "It's nearly dusk, and if they intend to finish me by daylight, they'll have to hurry up."

Still the scourging proceeded.

Hard-Heart glanced towards Arkansaw with a rather anxious expression on his face. The scout saw it, and at once read his intentions.

According to his pre-arranged plan, Hard-Heart kept the braves silent by pointing at the punishment Arkansaw was experiencing at the hands of the squaws, and he did not bid the latter desist until it was fairly dark, and too late to think of putting Arkansaw through the catalogue of tortures.

"We must wait for the sun to rise again," now said Hard-Heart. "Unbind the prisoner and take him away. See that he is closely guarded, for he is a great brave."

The Indians saw partially through the trick of Hard-Heart, and grumbled a little; but he exerted his authority and silenced them.

They drove back the squaws, eager yet to continue their cruel work, and then unbound the scout.

His hands had been stretched backward, the thongs that attached his wrists encircling the trunk.

No sooner was this thong untied than he clenched his fist and tumbled one Indian head over heels, and then, his feet being free, made a bold dash for life and liberty.

CHAPTER XX.

"WILL YOU LET HIM PERISH?"

WHEN morning broke and daylight stole down through the trees, into the camp where the Dinkel party was, not one among the men but breathed a sigh of relief.

They knew that Arkansaw had gone out to ascertain the position, and if possible the intentions of the Indian force. Before leaving

he had told Jake Dinkel not to be alarmed if he did not soon return.

"My absence will be a good sign that you are in no further danger," he had said. "If I am not back my daylight, it will be because the Indians have left the neighborhood, and I have followed them."

Since his departure they had been attacked, and had repulsed the Indians. The shot which had first alarmed them, Jake Dinkel attributed to the scout, who he thought had been unable to join them just at the moment.

So when morning came without Arkansaw's showing up, they became satisfied that the Indians had vacated the neighborhood.

Believing this to be the case, and solicitous concerning their stock and their all, left behind at the flight, they determined to at once return to the clearing.

Happily they were secure in so doing, and were not molested.

An hour or two after the return, the clearing was filled by the old busy bustle and sounds of industry.

As a memento of the Indian foray stood the ruins of the hut belonging to Jake Dinkel.

Another more sorrowful reminder of the terrible scenes through which they had just passed was hidden by a sheet, in an ordinary hut.

These hardy frontier people had but little time and as little disposition for sentiment, and they buried the poor fellow that afternoon. It may seem that they were in a hurry, but they reasoned that they could do him no good; he was in other hands now than theirs, and with a few words of eulogy and a simple prayer they laid him away to rest, beneath the shade of a leafy tree.

By this time the non-return of Arkansaw produced an uneasy feeling in Jake Dinkel's mind.

One of the men had been out reconnoitering, and had found the spot where the Indians had camped, together with ample evidence of their having taken a very hasty departure.

This fact assured Dinkel of the present safety of himself and friends.

Consequently he began to be worried on Arkansaw's account.

Brave and able as the latter was, it was still possible that he should not have been able to keep out of the hands of the Indians.

Dinkel had been told of what had happened at the fort, and it struck him that the scout—feeling Dinkel's party were safe—had gone to the fort.

"But no, he wouldn't a-done that without first coming and saying something about it," muttered Dinkel, and then, struck by an inspiration, he exclaimed: "I'll go to the fort! Gabe Wickett is there and will know what to do."

Gabe Wickett and his companions had been back scarcely half an hour when Dinkel put in an appearance, the doing of which quite startled the inmates of the fort, for they at first thought him the sole survivor of the fight which they felt sure the Indians had gone to force upon them.

He quickly undeceived them as far as this was concerned.

Then he told of the magnificent bearing of Arkansaw, how much they all owed him, what a debt of gratitude he had put them under, and ended by stating the fears he entertained for the scout's safety.

Gabe gravely listened to the reasons advanced by Dinkel for thinking as he did, and the honest fellow's face became very stern and set.

"I must have a few minutes to think," said Gabe, and moved away, then began thoughtfully pacing to and fro as he mentally digested what he had heard from Dinkel.

Meanwhile the rumor rapidly spread that Arkansaw was a captive among the Indians. Soon every one in the fort had heard it.

"Gabe—Gabe!"

The voice was a trembling and sad one.

He glanced up. Floy Raynor stood before him, and now placed one little hand on his arm.

"Gabe, do you think it true?"

"I'm afeard so," was the gloomy reply.

"Then why are you not away to his rescue?" in a tone almost sharp.

"I don't think it's of any use," was the choking reply. "If he's in the hands of Hard-Heart—"

Gabe paused and shuddered visibly.

"Will you let him perish?" demanded Floy, with a sudden desperate energy in her tone.

"Gabe—Gabe—will you let brave Arkansaw—noble Arkansaw—good Arkansaw—perish without having taken one step or raised your hand to prevent?"

"Gal, you loved Arkansaw?" in an almost fierce tone.

"I did—I do," and Floy's cheek grew rosy.

"So do I," blurted Gabe, "and I have known him years where you have days. Will I take a step or raise my hand to save him from perishing? Were you a man and dared to hint such a thing I would kill you in your tracks!"

"If you love him," and Floy never shrank one inch from the angry and anguished man, "go to his rescue."

"I will," said Gale, hoarsely.

In five minutes he had five companions, armed, ready and waiting, willing to risk their lives with him if aught of good could be accomplished for the brave and manly scout.

"Come, we will go first to your clearing," Gabe said to Dinkel, and off they started without a moment's delay, their faces resolute and set with determination.

Having reached Dinkel's clearing, Gabe had him conduct them to the spot where the Indian camp had been cast. That distance they would be saved going over after the break of day.

Until it was no longer possible to do so, Gabe had cherished the hope of finding Arkansaw at Dinkel's clearing. But no, he had not returned, nor had aught been heard of or from him.

Every minute seemed an age to these men, as they impatiently awaited the breaking of day.

There is a saying that the longest lane must have a turning, and at last day did break. Eagerly, then, these men began to scrutinize and examine the camp and surrounding ground, and especially the broad trail the Indians had left behind them on taking their hasty departure.

This last was being paid especial attention to by Gabe, who was down on his hands and knees, his head bent near the earth, looking something as a blood-hound does when searching for the scent. Slowly Gabe worked ahead, on his hands and knees, his eyes keenly scrutinizing every footprint that was visible.

Finally a half-sob, half-gasp, escaped him. He had made a discovery.

But he would not call the attention of the others, would not say anything, until he was positive.

Onward he crept. He came to a spot where the soil was a little more moist, where the impressions were a trifle plainer. There could no longer be any doubt, and he called the others to his side.

"Thar!" he exclaimed, pointing at a well defined footprint. "Thar's the evidence! Arkansaw was captured and was a prisoner when the Injuns left that thar spot yonder," nodding toward the camp.

"But how can you be so positive? That footprint looks no different to me from hundreds of others," said one of his companions.

"I once seed yer readin'. I couldn't do it—can't tell one letter from another—but I don't go for to say there ain't books, and that thar ain't some who can read 'em. These woods—this ground—the sky—the clouds—air my books. I've seen that thar footprint too many times to be mistaken in it."

"Lead on, Gabe. I'm with you," returned the other, convinced by Gabe's reasoning and confident manner of speaking.

There was no longer any reason for delay.

They looked at each other for one second, and each saw a look which told of a firm determination to stop at no danger, to never falter, to never turn aside, until the purpose for which they had come was accomplished.

Gabe cut out the pace, and he did not spare himself. They followed, and met his every effort with new energy, nor ever lagged once.

Steadily they pursued the broad trail, pausing only for a minute when they paused at all. Hour after hour they pressed onward, never flagging, with little or no hope of being able to save Arkansaw, yet determined never to give up until they had either rescued him or knew for sure he had fallen a victim to the vengeful fury of the redskins.

Rest and sleep were never thought of. The excitement prevented a single somnolent feeling.

Finally Gabe suddenly paused and pointed

to the body of a dead Indian—one of those shot by Lightning.

"We must be more careful now," said Gabe. "The 'sign' is getting very thick and fresh."

Hardly had the words fallen from his lips when a terrible yell echoed and re-echoed through the woods.

Crack! crack! crack! Half a dozen Indians rose up before them. They turned to flee, but their way was barred by as many more. They had unwittingly entered an ambushade.

Crack! crack! crack!

"To cover, lads!" exclaimed Gabe.

But one of their number did not respond. He had fallen with an Indian's bullet in his brain.

CHAPTER XXI.

LIGHTNING'S GRATITUDE.

HAD Arkansaw but once gained the cover of the woods the chances were a thousand to one in favor of his making his escape. His name of the Trackless was one he well merited, and which was descriptive, as most Indian names are.

But fate was against him.

He had not gone a dozen steps when his toe caught in the projecting roots of a tree, and he was sent headlong to the earth.

Before he could arise, the Indians were upon him, and he was again a prisoner.

Hard-Heart was at first inclined to soundly berate those who had unbound Arkansaw. But when he saw him secure in custody again he held his peace, being shrewd enough not to strain or tax his authority too far, it having been much weakened by the recent disasters, for which he was to a great extent responsible.

"Dog of a pale-face!" he exclaimed, striking Arkansaw across the face, thus venting on him the spleen he dared not visit on the braves.

Arkansaw laughed contemptuously.

"Only for that confounded root tossing me, you'd a been whistling for me now," he said. "Give me ten yards start in this gathering darkness, and I'd snap my fingers in your face."

"The Trackless will not have another such chance," grimly returned the Indian chief, and he took good care that his words should prove truthful, for he personally superintended Arkansaw's re-binding, and never lost sight of him until he was safely lodged again in his place of confinement.

"Well," reflected the scout, when he was left alone—"well, I've done all I could to save myself, and can do no more, as I see. Well, the jig is up with me. To-morrow afternoon, I suppose, they will put me to the torture, and wind up by burning me at the stake. Howsoever, it will be a barren victory for 'em, considering their losses."

For awhile Arkansaw was silent, and then, in a tone that was tinged with regret, he soliloquized:

"Poor Gabe! He'll feel bad when I don't come back—I know he will. And there's that little Floy Raynor—I wonder if she'd shed a tear about me? Bless her dear little heart, of course she will; she'd be sorry if a bird was to suffer. But would she shed a tear for me, personally?"

Arkansaw sighed. He was not afraid to meet the death which would probably be meted out to him on the morrow, but as he lay there he could not for the life of him help wishing he was free and back at the fort, and not so much of a frontiersman, not quite so rough, not quite so unpolished—in short, that he was just about such a man as he had an idea that the husband of Floy Raynor should be.

"Well—well," he at last murmured, "there's no use wishing, 'cause it can't be, and there's an end on't," and then he stretched himself out and tried to sleep.

He was resigned.

No longer had he any hopes or thoughts of being able to make his escape.

Nor did he for one moment imagine that a faithful friend was at that time planning and scheming to snatch him from the grasp of his enemies.

But such was the truth.

And the friend was the young white-Indian, the son of John Platt, known best by his Indian name of Lightning.

It was no mere jest on his part when he swore to avenge the cruel death of the Indian maiden Sunlight.

An Indian in so many respects, even though

none but white blood flowed in his veins, he was a thorough Indian in that he could neither forget an obligation nor forgive an injury.

After having so remorselessly killed the Indians Hard-Heart had sent in quest of those to whose care the stolen stock of Fort Platt had been committed, Lightning had prudently sought out a retreat, covering and blinding his trail so that he could not be tracked.

The braves sent out in search of him had been unable to find him, and thought that he had become frightened, and had fled the vicinity.

But had they only known it, they had once been within a dozen feet of him. Lightning's eyes flashed vindictively, he had raised his rifle, and on the very point of shooting had restrained himself on Arkansaw's account.

A double motive led him to wish to assist the scout to escape.

One was that the latter had twice saved his life. The other was because the escape of Arkansaw would be a much harder blow to Hard-Heart than the loss even of half a dozen braves.

When confident that all pursuit of himself had ceased, Lightning stole from his hiding-place, and silently as a snake made his way along until he reached a spot where he could see into the Indian village, reaching this point of vantage just at the time when the scout was being so cruelly scourged by the squaws.

He witnessed Arkansaw's daring but ineffectual dash for liberty, and his eyes lighted with a look of genuine admiration.

"He is a great brave!" said the white Indian. "It would be a pity for such a brave to die at the stake. Lightning will save him."

Several hours passed without Lightning moving an inch. He seemed as if carved out of stone, so still and motionless was he, while patiently waiting for the hour to arrive for him to act.

He had determined to enter the Indian village when all was silent in it, and all were sleeping.

It must have been fully midnight when Lightning stretched himself, and then moved softly out of his cover.

Not a sound broke the silence that hung over the village.

With stealthy steps, Lightning approached the outskirts of the village, and silently as a cat creeps forward to seize her unsuspecting victim, he entered it.

His hand was ever on the handle of his tomahawk, for he knew full well that his life was now carried in his hand. To be seen and recognized meant instant death.

He knew the place where the scout was confined, and toward this he laid his course, taking advantage of the shelter afforded by the huts or wigwams which lay in his path. Pausing as he gained the cover of each of these he would stand and listen intently before going on again.

The tactics of the Indians bear a great resemblance to the movements of a beast of prey, only that they exhibit a trifle more reason. Mentally, they might easily be the connecting link between man and the wild beasts.

Lightning began to smile.

He was doing splendidly. In another minute or two he would be in sight of Arkansaw's prison, and up to the present had met with no bar or check.

Then he suddenly drew his knife. He heard footsteps drawing near, coming in his direction.

It was a messenger whom Hard-Heart—uneasy about Arkansaw in spite of all his precautions—had sent to make sure that the scout was in safe-keeping.

The Indian turned the corner of the hut which just then concealed Lightning. The latter shrunk close to the building, in hopes that the other would pass without discovering him, for he did not wish to risk the possible alarm which a struggle might produce.

But he was discovered.

"Who are you?" was demanded, in the Indian tongue, the tone showing clearly that the speaker saw nothing to fear in the other's presence.

"Bear's-Meat," was the reply.

Had Lightning known exactly who the Indian was he would not have given this name, for the other was a brother of Bear's-Meat, who had been severely wounded and left be-

hind at Dinkel's clearing, facts unknown to Lightning.

Uttering an exclamation of mingled surprise and joy, the brother of Bear's-Meat stepped toward Lightning, who spoke again. His voice aroused suspicion in the other's mind, and—

"You are not Bear's-Meat!" he cried.

"No, I am not!" hissed Lightning, seeing that he was in for it, and darting his left hand forward his fingers gripped the Indian's throat, and like a flash, the keen knife sought the other's heart.

That vital organ was reached.

Without so much as a groan, the Indian expired. It was an opportune, as well as a lucky knife thrust, for, had it been delayed a little, or had proved ineffectual, a wild alarm must have been raised.

Lightning caught the falling body in his arms and laid it gently and noiselessly down.

Pausing but for a few seconds, holding the blood-dripping knife in his hand, he again advanced on the hut where Arkansaw was kept.

From the next cover that Lightning gained he could see the door of the prison-pen. He at first could hardly believe his eyes, but true it was—there was no sentinel before it, as he had expected there would be.

It did not occur to him that the guard might be encircling the hut and that he was now concealed by it.

Sheathing his knife, Lightning went swiftly but silently toward Arkansaw's prison.

He had reached the door, had knocked on it to attract the scout's attention, when a guttural exclamation caused him to turn. The sentinel stood beside him, his hand on his tomahawk. He bent forward, then seemed to recognize Lightning, for he uttered a shrill, warning whoop.

CHAPTER XXII.

AWAY.

WHEN the guard before Arkansaw's prison-pen uttered the warning whoop that rang through the village and alarmed the braves in every wigwam, it seemed as if Lightning's attempt to save the scout would end in a miserable failure, and probably cost him his own life as well.

But at such a juncture, a quick eye and a ready hand can often change the whole aspect of affairs.

He who is the quickest with the revolver, or knife, or tomahawk, is the best man.

And Lightning proved to be the quickest.

Every movement of his was inexpressibly swift—whence his name—and ere the guard could raise his weapon to strike Lightning down, the latter had snatched out his tomahawk, and in the fraction of a second it was buried to the head in the Indian's brain.

Bolts and bars were then unknown among the Indians, and the rude door of the prison-pen was secured by a multitude of rawhide thongs, fastened to pegs.

Lightning did not pause to attempt to untie these things.

One blow from his keen tomahawk severed them, and he dashed in the door as the thongs were parted.

Arkansaw had been sleeping when Lightning tapped on the door, but being a light sleeper, had been aroused. Long habit had so trained his mind that the moment his eyes opened he was wide awake, instead of like many people, awaking gradually.

He sprang to the door, just as the guard sent up the warning whoop.

An enemy of the Indians was near. Being an enemy to them, it must be a friend of his, thought the scout.

He heard the sickening sound, as the tomahawk cleft the Indian's brain, and heard the blow which followed and severed the thongs.

As the door was sent open, Arkansaw bounded forth, and hearing a satisfied exclamation, from the voice alone recognized Lightning.

"I knew you was a trump—that your pale-face blood must show," said the scout. "But here, cut these bonds on my wrists—quick! the whole village is aroused!"

In a second or two his hands were free.

"Take his weapons!" and Lightning pointed at the dead sentinel. "We may have to fight."

"Good idea," muttered Arkansaw, swiftly bending down. As he arose a glad cry fell

from his lips. "I've got old reliable back again!" he exclaimed.

Chance had so arranged it that the sentinel guarding him that night was the Indian who had become the possessor of Arkansaw's rifle. The scout recognized the weapon the moment his hand touched it.

To seize this and possess himself of the powder horn and bullet pouch, and knife, and tomahawk, was the work of only a few seconds; and then they sprang swiftly away as the braves began to rush out-of-doors on every side.

One Indian saw them coming and tried to check them.

His temerity cost him his life.

Lightning, while running at full speed, sent his tomahawk flying from his hand. True to its aim, the weapon cleft the skull of the opposer, and he fell heavily.

On the fly Lightning recovered his weapon, and on they dashed again.

Crack!

Crack!

Several of the braves had grabbed their muskets as they dashed from their huts, and catching a glimpse of the dark figures began to blaze away.

Crack!

Crack!

In the excitement of the moment they aimed badly and the fugitives escaped unharmed, although the bullets came uncomfortably close.

Then came a demoniac yell of rage.

Like a pack of bloodthirsty blood-hounds the savages now dashed in the direction they had taken.

Escape or no escape, Arkansaw could not resist the temptation of doing as he had often done to them before, and pausing just before plunging into a thicket, he waved his hand above his head and sent back a contemptuous cry of defiance.

It came near costing him very dear, for his momentary pause enabled an Indian to take better aim at him.

Crack!

The bullet skimmed over his hatless head, cutting a furrow in the hair and grazing his scalp until it felt as if a red-hot poker had been laid across it.

"Close!" he grunted, shook his head, then sprang swiftly away.

The scout felt like thanking Lightning for his friendship, for the risk he had run in thus rescuing him. But there was no time for words, nor indeed would it be wise to so waste his breath at present.

On-on—they dashed through the woods, now striking against some root and going headlong, now scrambling up, now bumping up against one tree as they swiftly sprang aside at finding another in their path.

But they cared nothing for bumps and bruises. Both understood the situation and were aiming at one thing. If they could only increase their lead so much that the pursuers could no longer be guided by the noise they made, they would have an opportunity to resort to strategy.

To accomplish this, then, they were straining every muscle, making every effort.

Before day broke this object was attained, and they suddenly turned and followed a course at right angles with that which they had been following.

Just as the sun arose, Arkansaw paused and faced his companion.

"Lightning, there's my hand! Are you too much of an Indian to shake a white man by the hand?"

"No, the Trackless is a great brave—it is an honor to take him by the hand," was the reply, as his grasp met the cordial one of Arkansaw.

"Now, then, you have helped me to escape, at the risk of your own life, for Hard-Heart would kill you if he knew it. How much further are you friendly to me?"

"To the fort."

"To the fort!" echoed the scout. "Are you not going back to the village?"

"No. Henceforth, the Lightning is tribeless," in a gloomy tone, and with darkening brow. "Sunlight, the daughter of Hard-Heart, was to come to the wigwam of the Lightning. She is dead—Hard-Heart killed her because she loved me. Already have five braves fallen by this hand in avenging her, and more blood must yet flow."

"Then you are with me?"

"I am."

"Good! Then come on. Follow my every movement closely."

Arkansaw now proceeded to put into practice the peculiar tactics by which he blinded his trail, which had gained for him the name of the Trackless.

Lightning imitated every move made by the scout; he could understand the shrewdness of every step the scout took, and his admiration for the "great pale-face brave" became deeper and greater.

Meanwhile, progressing in this manner by jumping from stone to stone and never putting foot to ground where a print could possibly be left, Arkansaw was keeping his eyes open in quest of a secure cover.

At length he found one that drew from him an exclamation of deep satisfaction.

A heavy tornado which must have swept over the spot years before had made what is called on the frontiers, a "windrow." That is, it had prostrated, like a curlick, a belt of trees, while on either side the woods showed no signs of the tornado.

The trees in this windrow had not all been killed by this rude treatment. In the spot which had attracted the attention of the scout, half a dozen trees had enough roots remaining in the ground to keep them alive, and though prostrate they still leafed out in the spring and grew and thrived in a manner that was marvelous, considering the circumstances.

Parting the foliage carefully, Arkansaw and Lightning crept under the leafy screen, and once there could defy the closest scrutiny.

Hard-Heart and the Indians were not idle during all this time.

Waiting until daylight came to their aid, they picked up the trail at the point where they could no longer follow it because of losing the sounds produced by the flight of Arkansaw and his assistant, whoever he was.

"It was Lightning," said Hard-Heart, after having examined the trail. "He it was who has robbed us of our victim. He shall be put to the torture."

Like sleuth-hounds, Hard-Heart's party followed the trail to the point where it so suddenly disappeared.

"It is useless!" gloomily said one of the braves. "Does he fly, that he leaves no trail?"

But Hard-Heart knew that it was all accomplished by natural means, even though he could not understand those means; and he ordered half a dozen braves to spread out and beat up the woods carefully, meanwhile looking for where the trail might again commence.

One of these scouts sent out passed near to the covert of the scout and Lightning. The latter was with difficulty restrained from sending a bullet into the Indian's head.

The Indian scout paused, and his eyes for a full minute rested suspiciously on their place of concealment; and then an incredulous smile parted his lips as he flashed his eyes over the earth.

There was no trail leading to this cover, consequently it was impossible that they should be there.

The Indian was just on the point of leaving when he suddenly pricked up his ears, a movement imitated by the scout and Lightning.

"It is Hard-Heart's signal for the braves to gather," said Lightning, turning to Arkansaw, just as the Indian scout hurried swiftly away.

"It must have some significance," mused the scout. "What can it mean?"

But he would not leave the cover just yet; it would be folly to run themselves into new peril without some good cause. Lying there, both waited and listened.

At last, from some distance, came a wild yell and the crack of rifles.

"It is a rescuing party sent after me!" exclaimed the scout, "and they have run into an ambush. Come!" and they broke cover, and like deer, sprang toward the scene of the conflict.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LAST BLOW.

WHILE Hard-Heart and a few companions stood waiting, the scouts sent out by him in search of Arkansaw's trail kept coming to and fro with their reports, always of non-success, and to receive new orders.

Moody and gloomy, and boiling over with rage at the reflection that Arkansaw had

escaped him, a gleam of pleasure was brought to his face when at last he listened to the report of one of the scouts. The report was that the scout had discovered a body of six white men following the trail which led to their village.

"We will draw them into an ambuscade and kill them all," said the Indian chief, hoarsely. "We lose one pale-face, and six are thrown into our hands. It is well! What say my brothers?" appealing to those beside him.

For answer their eyes glittered a little more brightly, while they significantly placed their hands on the handles of their tomahawks, the weapon of all others on which an Indian most depends, and on which he places the greatest reliance in a close struggle.

At once Hard-Heart had uttered his gathering cry, loud enough to reach the ears of the scattered Indians, but not loud enough to be heard by Gabe's party, who were still some distance away, unaware, of course, that their approach had been discovered.

They were informed that this was the case in a most startling manner, the first intimation being received when the wild yells of the Indians and a volley of bullets informed them that they had entered the lines of an ambuscade.

They had naturally faced about for the purpose of retreating until they could find a cover. But the way had been blocked.

Then Gabe sprang to one side of the trail, calling to the others to follow. One of the number did not respond. He lay there dead, with the blood oozing from a bullet-hole in his head.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

The bullets whistled harmlessly over the spot where the pale-faces had been but a moment before. All five had found cover now in a dense clump of low bushes.

It was a terrible situation!

Not one was there in that party who did not know that his life was in the greatest jeopardy which he had ever known.

They dared not leave the clump of bushes. To have done so was to precipitate themselves into the hands of a body of Indians, many times stronger than they were, while if they remained quiet, the Indians would soon have their rifles re-loaded and then would pepper the bushes, in which case some one of them, or all of them, would be hit sooner or latter.

"Say your prayers, boys!"

It was Gabe who spoke, and his words were evidence that he saw no hope of successfully getting out of the trap they had fallen into.

"Do we stand no show at all?" asked one.

"Durned little!" was the hasty reply.

"Boys, we might's well look the case squarely in the face. Say yer prayers, but be brief. Then we'll make a sortie. Some one may git off, but most on us'll leave our scalps in the clutches of the red devils."

Brief indeed were the prayers they uttered.

"We are ready," said one, in a strained voice. "Let's settle the thing and have it over as soon as possible."

"Let every man be ready with his rifle," said Gabe, in a perfectly cool tone. "Hist! No noise! They must not have a single second to get ready for our dash."

One minute of bated breathing, to gather their muscles, and then:

"Now!" said Gabe, in a hoarse whisper.

Crash!

Crack—crack!

Crack—crack!

Crack—crack!

The crash was caused by the pale-faces springing from the clump of bushes. The volley was that of the Indians poured into the clump at the command of Hard-Heart, every bullet of which arrived too late to do injury.

"Now!"

Again Gabe spoke.

Crack—crack!

Crack—crack!

Crack!

Five rifles belched forth their smoke and leaden messengers, and, unlike the volley of the Indians, it was not thrown away. Four of the red devils never again would whoop and shout; never again would wield the tomahawk; never again make use of the cruel scalping-knife.

The rifles of the Indians having been discharged, it now became a hand-to-hand con-

flict—the five white men against a dozen or fifteen Indians.

It was a grand struggle on the part of the white men!

Clubbing their rifles, they rushed at the red foe. They expected to die anyhow, and they were reckless in their bravery.

Thud!

Gabe's rifle stock fell with crushing force on an Indian's head, and he fell with a groan.

"I wouldn't take your headache for a good deal," muttered Gabe. "Come on now, ye red varmints—come on! Come on, until I give headaches to some more of ye!"

Gabe's words encouraged the others, and they fought with mad fury.

But they were so greatly outnumbered that soon the closing in parties of Indians had them penned in a small space.

They dropped their rifles now, and back planted against back, they faced the foe with drawn knives.

A tomahawk came flying at Gabe's head. He dodged and let it fly past, and so great was its force that it felled an Indian in the other party. A savage had followed the tomahawk's flight, and got within arm's length of Gabe before he saw that the latter would escape him.

Gabe reached out. His arm was swiftly raised, the flashing blade claimed a victim, a sight which drew a furious yell from the Indians who saw the brave fall.

They were heroes, every man of them. But they were too hard pressed.

Fight as bravely as they would, the space about them was slowly contracted. They were almost as helpless to prevent this as a young lamb is when gradually wrapped in the deadly and crushing folds of aboa-constrictor.

Closer and closer the yelling red devils pressed in on them.

There was barely room now to wield a knife. In another minute they could easily be reached by the tomahawk, and then the end would come.

"Well done!" cried Gabe. "We have already killed more than our own number. Make 'em sick, boys, make 'em sick, and—"

Crack!

Crack!

Suddenly Gabe was interrupted by the reports of two rifles, one following closely on the heels of the other. In either party an Indian fell, and one of them was Hard-Heart, the chief.

"Friends are at hand!" yelled Gabe. "Make the Injuns sick, boys, make 'em sick!"

From out of the woods, where the smoke of the rifles was curling upward, bounded the figures of two men, Arkansaw and Lightning. The latter had begged to be allowed to shoot Hard-Heart, and Arkansaw had assented, and, as they sprang from their cover, had torn open Lightning's hunting shirt, thus exposing his bare white breast, as a protection against the hands of Gabe's party, who, from the color of his face, might take him for an Indian.

The redskins saw their chief fall, saw the two men springing forward, and with accents of fear they murmured:

"It is the Trackless!"

Suddenly the vim departed from their fighting, and it became half-hearted, and they lacked now a common purpose and inclination.

Gabe saw this.

"Make 'em sick, boys, make 'em sick!" was his battle-cry, and sick indeed were the redskins made.

The Indians would have shown the pale-faces no quarter, and the latter in turn showed none to them. It was a fight of extermination.

Into that fray Arkansaw flung himself. The tide had been turned when Hard-Heart

fell, and now the current set strongly in favor of the whites.

Blood flowed like water, and it was nearly all the blood of the redskins. They at last could no longer stand the terrible punishment, and one by one they flung themselves into the bushes and tried to sneak away. But every one of them was watched, and many a one met his death when congratulating himself on having obtained cover—on being out of the fray.

Only four of the Indians escaped.

A wild, triumphant laugh drew the attention of the party to where Lightning knelt beside Hard-Heart.

From the moment of joining in the fray, Lightning had steadily fought his way nearer to where the chief had fallen. He had not intended his shot to be fatal, but had designed it to strike him down and give the chief into his avenging hands.

Lightning had at last reached the spot, and found Hard-Heart dying of his wound, but creeping laboriously toward the bushes to conceal himself there.

Lightning seized him and turned him on his back, as if the chief were a turtle, and then his scalping-knife sprang forth.

"Hard-Heart called me a coward!" hissed Lightning. "He sneered at me because I came back from the war-path without scalps! You killed my Sunlight! Her blood cried from the ground that sucked it up for vengeance! Thus do I take my first scalp!"

He seized the chief's scalp-lock in his left hand, and with the knife in his right, cut through the flesh to the bone, and then tore off the reeking trophy, his shout of victory mingling with a cry of anguish from Hard-Heart.

"Hark!"

Lightning bent forward in the attitude of one who listened, while he held his breath in suspense.

"The innocent blood of Sunlight no longer hath a tongue."

So he softly said, gazed at Hard-Heart's last drawn breath, his last convulsion, and then drew away with saddened and clouded face.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AND LAST.

Two days later the party reached the fort, having Lightning in their company and reverently bearing the body of their fallen comrade.

Never again would Hard-Heart or any of his band give them any trouble, for before leaving the place of that grand struggle they had gone to the Indian village and relentlessly killed every male member of the community who was able to go on the war-path.

The others were spared, but their village was swept from existence.

It is not our wish now to spin out this story by introducing all that occurred on the return to the fort.

That Arkansaw received a warm welcome, from all, is needless to say, as it is equally so to say that Floy Raynor's was the warmest of all.

"And would you have felt so very bad if I hadn't come back?" Arkansaw asked, when tears came into Floy's eyes, as she heard of the great peril he had been in.

"I—I—guess so," as Floy suddenly took to her heels, much to the astonishment of the scout.

"Dang me if I can understand women," he muttered to himself. "I wonder why she acts so funny with me? Now, if I wasn't so rough—was handsome, and a good talker, and a ladies' man, I'd think—that—possibly—she—"

It seemed foolish to him to allow himself to even think of such a thing as was in his

mind. Nevertheless, he could not help it and his eyes used to follow Floy around when he was in her presence, in a tender and dreamy way.

"See here, pard," said Gabe, one day, "why don't you brace up to Floy?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why don't you tell her?"

"Tell her what?"

"Come, now," in a tone of disgust, "yer can't bamboozle me. Don't we all see it and all know it? And don't she know it, too? And ain't she a-gittin' mad 'cause yer ain't got the spunk to speak right out square?"

"Getting mad? Why, it can't be, Gabe, that she—that she—she—"

"But it is," said Gabe, emphatically.

"You are sure of it?" a great joy lighting up Arkansaw's noble and honest face.

"Sure of it? Didn't she tell me so herself? And didn't she go for me, like the vixen she is, when I didn't start soon enough to rescue you to please her? Yes—yes, Arkansaw, it's all right where she's concerned, but—"

"But what?"

"I'm sorry for yer."

"Sorry for me? Why, if it all proves true, Gabe, this earth won't hold a happier man."

Gabe gravely shook his head.

"She's spunky, she is," he slowly said. "And when a man gets married he's tied down—no more four or five months in the woods at a stretch. And then the responsibility of young ones—"

A tear actually stood in Gabe's eye. He would almost as soon have seen Arkansaw compelled to run the gantlet, as to see him get married.

Arkansaw afterward learned that Gabe had not misstated facts as regarded Floy, and at once proclaimed himself as being the happiest man on earth.

"And you love me, Floy, ugly-looking as I am, and with only one ear on my head?" he had said.

"If your other ear and nose were gone, I'd still love you," said Floy, with a merry laugh. "But if you were to lose an arm now—"

with a demurely mischievous look.

"Well, why would that make any more difference than the loss of ears and nose?"

"Oh! you don't hug me with your ears and nose," said Floy, and then punished him for his lack of perception by running away.

As for Lightning, he made the fort his home, but for years he spent the greater part of his time in the woods.

Gradually, however, dormant recollections of early childhood were awakened within him, and he came to know and recognize Mrs. Platt as his mother. Little by little his character underwent a change, and he lost the Indian traits which had been instilled into him, and the life among the savages at last became to him something like a dream.

But he was never thoroughly reclaimed until after his marriage to Mary McGrath, whom our readers will remember.

John Platt teased Floy a great deal as the day approached which had been set for her marriage to Arkansaw.

"Take my advice and don't marry him," said John Platt, with a laugh. "The idea of marrying a man with only one ear. What a comical sight it will be to see a lot of little Arkansaws all going around with only one ear."

But all the little Arkansaws that came along in due course of time had the full complement of ears, a fact over which John Platt never failed to express his surprise in a bantering tone.

Well, our story—our true story!—is ended, save to add that not many years after a new settlement and new fort sprang up not far from the Platts, and Arkansaw named it for Floy by calling it Fort Raynor.

[THE END.]

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